

PATHWAY TO GOD

THROUGH

TAMIL LITERATURE

I - Through the Thiruvaachakam.

An original interpretation and translation
of
The Thiruvaachakam
By
G. VANMIKANATHAN



A DELHI TAMIL SANGAM PUBLICATION

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

THE THIRUVAACHAKAM is an unique poem which embodies, in the most intense and complete form; all the emotions of Maanikkavaachakar, the saint poet of Tamilnaadu, recollected and recounted by him in tranquility. Manivaachakar, as he is also called, pours out in this great work, his mystic experience – potentially common to all but peculiarly deep and vivid to him – and reveals the ideal reconciliation of opposite forces, by tracing the exact relationship of God with the individual soul and the world.

The “poet of ruby utterances” sings the poem, the song of eternity, with a clear and serene voice. His poetry is the outcome of spontaneous overflow of emotions. Through *The Thiruvaachakam*, Maanikkavaachakar has made available to the Tamils the same pathway to Godhead even as the Upanishads do. The work of Maanikkavaachakar has justifiably attracted the notice and affection of foreign scholars like the Rev. Dr. G. U. Pope, who first brought out in 1900 an English translation in metrical form with notes and concordance. Some more scholars have also brought out translations of and commentaries on this masterpiece. The present work, although an addition to the existing literature, is not just one more translation of the original but is an interpretation of the text from a new angle by a person who has spent more than 30 years in its study.

Shri G. Vanmikanathan's approach and interpretation of this great work bears ample testimony to his great erudition, ardent devotion and deep intuition. The Delhi Tamil Sangam is indebted to Shri G. Vanmikanathan, with whom its connection spreads for over a quarter of a century, for giving it the privilege of publishing the book. In 1950, when the Delhi Tamil Sangam published the book "Kamba-Raamaayanam—A study" by V. V. S. Aiyar, the editing and completing of that work was undertaken by him.

In keeping with the aim of the Delhi Tamil Sangam in making available to the public their publications at the lowest price possible, this book is priced at Rs. 7/- only. The Sangam takes pride in having the privilege of publishing this unique work during its Silver Jubilee Year.

Dated March 1st 1971 }
 Sector - 5 }
 Raamakrishnapuram }
 New Delhi - 22. }

DELHI TAMIL SANGAM

TAMIL AND ITS LITERATURE

The Tamil language is a very ancient one, either coeval with Sanskrit or earlier than that. It belongs to the agglutinative group of languages while Sanskrit belongs to the inflectional group of languages. It was a remarkably well developed language even before the second century B. C., when its first, greatest, and still unsurpassed grammar was written which is called the *Tholkaappiyam*, literally, 'The Ancient Classic'. It is divided into three parts, viz., Alphabets or Letters, Words, and Body-politic. The last two are unique to this grammar, the former defining the meanings of words and the latter describing the subjective and objective life of the people of those times. It goes without saying that there should have been and was a vast literature preceding this grammar and from which this grammar formulated its rules. But there is little or nothing left of it except a few doubtful scraps which scholars claim as fragments of that literature. For all practical purposes, therefore, the *Tholkaappiyam* is the earliest Tamil work available to us today. The second oldest work we have is *The Thirukkural*, which scholars place in the last quarter of the 1st century B. C. It is remarkable that the language of these two hoary works is not very different – I nearly said, not different at all – from the Tamil of this century. Such was the perfect development – *samskriti* – of the language even so far back as the 2nd and 1st centuries B. C.

The origin of this language may be traced to Sumeria; moreover, it has links with the ancient Brahmi script.

If the *Tholkaappiyam* is the grammar for the language, *The Thirukkural* is the grammar for the conduct of life. In 133 chapters, in 1330 couplets of no more than seven feet each, the work contains between its two covers all that a man needs know for his moral, material, and spiritual prosperity.

Down the centuries since then, till the 12th century and later too, many great works – worldly and and spiritual – have appeared in the Tamil language. Cilappathikaaram, Manimekalai, Jeevaka-Chintaamani, Aha-naanooru and Pura-naanooru, the Ten Idylls (barring the Thirumurugaatrappadai which is a spiritual work), the Eighteen Minor works, the Kamba Raamaayanam, Villi Bhaaritham, are some of the lay works. The Eighteen Minor Works (in which *The Thirukkural* is included) are, by and large, didactic works.

Spiritual works, Pathways to God, are never more profuse in any language than in Tamil. They are divided into *Thoththiram* and *Saaththiram*, i. e., Hymns and Works on Doctrine respectively. Among the *thoththirams*, the first in point of time and merit too is *The Thiruvaachakam*. This and the *Thiruk-kovaiyaar*, by Maanikkavaachakar, are placed by scholars in the 3rd century A. D. They top the list with 658 and 400 stanzas respectively, and are followed by the first seven *Thirumurais*, the devotional works of St. Thirugnaanasambandar, St. Thirunaavukkarasar (both contemporaries in the 6th century A. D.) and that of Sundarar of early 9th century. These form the bulk of the Twelve *Thirumurais* and contain between

FOREWORD

Maanikkavaachakar, the author of *The Thiruvaachakam*, is traditionally considered to be an exemplar of the *Gnaana Maargam* (the path of wisdom). What is *gnaanam*? Sekkilaar, the author of the *Periyapuraanam*, who frequently refers to Thirugnaana-sambandhar as *gnanaram undaar* (the one who imbibed wisdom) says that, according to him, *gnaanam* is only 'love for the Lord'. With this clue to guide us, we may recall in this context the following utterance in *The Tiruvaachakam*.

What am I, what worth is my mind,
What matters my learning, who would recognise me,
had not the Lord of the heavenly beings
enslaved me ?*

(The metaphysical problems relating to the self, the mind etc., cannot be solved unless, in His grace, the Lord is pleased to bring us under His rule.) If, without the divine eye He gives us in His boundless love, we cannot see anything in the proper perspective, the very least we can do, is to reciprocate His love. But can we reciprocate His *boundless* love? Maanikka-vaachakar is reminded of Kannappar who has perhaps set an all-time high record of selfless love. He sings plaintively that having seen the peerless love of

* நானூர் என் உள்ளமார் ஞானங்களார்
வானூர் பிரான் என்னை ஆண்டிலனேல்.

Kannappar, the Lord was pleased to show His mercy even unto himself who was peerless in lovelessness! It is because of such immortal and boundless longing to love the Lord that Maanikkavaachakar blames himself severely whenever he feels even the slightest separation from the Lord. (The present translator offers an interesting and suggestive explanation of such self-reproach.) The longing to be the loving servant of the Lord and of His devotees is the common thread running through all his verses. He refers to the *miracle* of one so unworthy as himself being saved by the Lord. It is, in his words, like 'placing a dog on a golden seat'. He speaks of the *wonder* of his being admitted to the company of the Lord's devotees. A change in his sense of values enables him to see the Lord as the Highest, or the only thing of value, everything else having value only by virtue of being related to Him. This change brought about by the Lord, he considers to be nothing short of a miracle. Going the way of the senses, to be 'of the earth, earthy', is all too common. But that he should be called to be in the company of devotees, is something uncommon, something of a wonder. (The present translator has interesting comments to offer about *arputham* and *athisayam*—miracle and wonder).

The power of *The Thiruvaachakam* to stir one to the core of one's being has been widely acclaimed in Tamilnaadu for centuries. Sri G. Vanmikanathan has followed up his translation of the *Thirukkural* and his *Maanikkavaachakar—Poet and Mystic* with an interpretative English rendering of the whole of the *Thiru-*

vaachakam to make it available to a wider public. I was given the privilege of going through this work before its publication. Considering the difficulty in interpreting a work of profound religious experience and the added difficulty in rendering this work in a foreign language with a different idiom, literary convention etc., I feel that Sri Vanmikanathan has been remarkably successful in his undertaking. Some lines of *The Thiruvaachakam* which, G. U. Pope, its first translator into English, left out as improper are translated here without omission. Bearing in mind, the literary convention of the language of the original (Tamil) and the spirit of its author, one may find nothing improper here. It is salutary to remember with due deference to foreign scholars, the witticism, 'To the Puritan, all things are impure'.

Sri Vanmikanathan has given valuable aids by way of introductory sections and appendices, apart from his explanation of the title, sub-title, etc., of each composition, brief explanatory notes of allusions and key phrases. He has not only studied the several commentaries on this work but has also meditated on the verses seeking *rapport* with the spirit of the author. This makes him deviate in some places from accepted interpretations. This is an indirect invitation to the reader also to attempt to understand the text in his own way. For, after all, every individual is bound to see things in the light of his own experience which, however, may grow richer with each attempt and with the Lord's grace.

I greatly enjoyed the forceful, apt and felicitous rendering of *Thiruvaachakam* given by Sri Vanmikanathan. May it give its readers a taste of that joy which *Maanikkavaachakar* has distilled for us in his *Thiruvaachakam*.

Madras, }
14-1-1971. }

V. A. DEVASENAPATHI.

P R E F A C E

The seed of love for *The Thiruvaachakam* was planted in me when I was twelve years old. My father used to chant the *Civapuraanam*, the first decad of *The Thiruvaachakam*, in his daily morning worship. He used to chant it quite loudly, and the sound will fill every nook and corner of the house. The opening words of that decad, *Namachchivaaya vaazhga*, heard in those first few months of 1912 – my father died in March of that year – were ringing in the ear of my ears for many decades before an interest in the great work was born in me. It was only from 1940 onwards that I was slowly drawn to the work, and, soon, I was myself chanting the *Civapuraanam* in my daily worship.

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Many years, however, were to pass before a *guru* sought me out and graciously began giving lessons to me in *The Thiruvaachakam*. That happy day was the 4th Februrary 1951. I have been very blessed indeed in being able to draw the attention of a *guru* like Sri V. Subbaraayar of Bombay to whom I owe everything of what I know of *The Thiruvaachakam*. He sought me out, took me under his wing, and patiently laid open to me the mysteries of *The Thiruvaachakam*, Sunday after Sunday, holiday after holiday, for 5 years. Moreover, out of his great love for me, he prepared for me elaborate written commentaries to several decads of *The Thiruvaachakam*. To him I pay my humble obeisance again and again, for I have nothing else to offer him in return for his graciousness.

I humbly dedicate this work to him.

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It was in September 1961 that I had my first *dharshan* of His Holiness Sri Kaanchi Kaamakoti Sri Chandra sekara Saraswathi Sankaraachaarya Swaamigal. Then, he very graciously recalled to mind my humble work in connection with the publication of V. V. S. Aiyar's *magnum opus* — *Kamba Raamaayanam — A Study* — and blessed me in these words: “Keep continuing to do service to Tamil like this”. That blessing, that command, has been my inspiration and strength in editing and publishing *The Thirukkural* in Hindi verse (1967), in translating *The Thirukkural* in English prose (1969), and in interpreting and translating *The Thiruvaachakam* now. To that saint, I pay my humble homage and tender my gratitude for his unfailing grace and pray that I may continue to deserve it for ever and ever.

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Dr B. Natarajan, a dear friend with a puckish sense of humour, was responsible for making me write on *The Thiruvaachakam*. At his suggestion, Rev. Fr. Xavier S. Thaninaayagam, then Editor of *Tamil Culture*, wrote to me in 1953 asking me to contribute an article to that Quarterly. I wrote three articles in that Quarterly. They are “The Verities of The Thiruvaachakam—Maanikka-vaachakar & Rumi”, “Maanikkavaachakopanishad”, and “Passionless Passion”. Some years later, at the request of Sri P. N. Thiyaagaraajan of Calcutta, I wrote “An Introduction to Thiruvaachakam” for his annual, “*Tamil Literature*”.

It was a Roman Catholic who helped me to appear in print on *The Thiruvaachakam*, and it is an Association of Roman Catholic youngmen – The Newman Association – which is responsible for my venturing to translate *The Thiruvaachakam* into English. This Association asked me to give a series of talks on *Caiva Siddhaanthaa*; when I pleaded my ignorance of that subject and offered to talk, in its stead, on *The Thiruvaachakam*, the Secretary kindly accepted the offer. Thus arose the three talks in November 1969 on “Maanikkavaachakar – Poet & Mystic” which, later, appeared in April 1970 as a booklet and now appears as an introduction to this book.

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“How humble the tool when praised for what the hand has done”, says Dag Hammarskjöld. With him, I feel that it was the will of God which brought about both these requests to me who am neither a speaker nor a writer, and that I am but a tool in the hands of God – a tool of poor quality – but, nevertheless, a tool chosen by Him. I have been keenly aware of this even from the time I edited and published V. V. S. Aiyar’s *Kamba-Raamaayanam—A Study* in 1950. The story of how I was “inveigled” by God to do that work is a long one; it is enough to say that a joke was responsible for my getting involved in that work. Maanikkavaachakar sings :

“The lowly ones, however lowly,

Very high, indeed, You raise.” (5-10)

Jalal-ud-din Rumi says: "Sometimes the action of God appears like this, sometimes the contrary ... " I, therefore, know only too well that I am nothing and God is all. This work, therefore, has been undertaken for His glory.

* * *

If the Newman Association is responsible for my translating *The Thiruvaachakam*, it is The Delhi Tamil Sangam is responsible for this book appearing in print.

In my Preface to my translation of the *Thirukkural* in 1969, I said :

"I pay my homage and gratitude to the Delhi Tamil Sangam which nurtured and developed my love of Tamil, and whose members took great pains to guide me in the study of *The Thirukkural*, *The Thiruvaachakam* and the Tamil classics. Wherever I am and in whatever service of Tamil I am engaged, I always consider myself a worker of the Delhi Tamil Sangam. On merely hearing that I was doing this translation (*that of The Thirukkural*), and without seeing the work at all, the Delhi Tamil Sangam most generously offered to publish the book as a part of its Silver Jubilee programme which falls in 1971. My age and my impatience are reasons for this early publication."

In spite of my (churlish) refusal to accept such a spontaneous and generous offer at that time, the Delhi Tamil Sangam, with a magnanimity of heart all its

own, has now graciously undertaken the publication of this work and has borne the bulk of the cost of printing it. I am deeply grateful to the President and members of the Executive Committee of the Sangam for this honour conferred on me and I pray that the Sangam may grow apace and serve for centuries to come as an ambassador of Tamilnaadu in Delhi, contributing its share towards the moral, cultural, social, and religious integration of our motherland.

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There was once a belief that no commentary should be written for *The Thiruvaachakam*; there is still a belief in some quarters that it should not be translated. In the former case, it was a deep reverence for the work coupled with the fear that the work would become an open book to the uninitiated and would cause harm to them. The unknown fourteenth century author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* was similarly adverse to his book falling into the hands of all and sundry and he solemnly laid a charge on any possessor of his book in these words :

“I charge and beg you, with all the strength and power that love can bring to bear, that whoever you may be who possess this book (perhaps, you own it, or are keeping it, carrying it, or borrowing it) you should, quite freely and of set purpose, neither read, write, or mention it to any one, nor allow it to be read, written, or mentioned by anyone unless that person is in your judgement really and wholly determined to follow Christ perfectly.”

Rev. Fr. William Johnstone, author of *Mysticism of The Cloud of Unknowing*, reiterates the above sentiments thus :

“ Moreover, all who read *The Cloud* are begged in charity to do so with great caution lest, in a matter of great delicacy, they be led into error ; they should read it several times to grasp the true meaning. This is no book for curious learned or unlearned men.”

The Thiruvaachakam too, as my Guru, Sri V. Subbarayar used to say again and again , is “ no book for curious learned or unlearned men”. I would, therefore, beg the readers of *The Thiruvaachakam*, even as Rev. Fr. Johnstone does in the case of *The Cloud*, “ to read the book with great caution lest, in a matter of great delicacy, they be led into error ”.

Let them read this great work, “ not as scholars or as curious observers of phenomena, but as apprentices.”

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In the case of the objection to translation, the belief is based on the view that the poems of *The Thiruvaachakam* are untranslatable and that they suffer grievously by translation. There is no denying that there is quite a large element of truth in this point of view. Even in the case of merely rendering a book like the *Cloud of Unknowing* from old English into modern English, Mr. Clifton Wolters writes regretfully thus :

“There is an obvious loss in being deprived of the book’s original language. It has a strength and rhythm and beauty of its own, and a score of memorable phrases which do not stand the strain of being translated.”

This obvious loss of which Mr. Clifton Wolters speaks becomes manifold in the case of *The Thiruvaachakam*. For here it is a case of translating from an oriental language—a language which does not even belong to the Indo-European group of languages—into an occidental language. If the *Cloud of Unknowing* has a score of memorable phrases, *The Thiruvaachakam* has hundreds of such phrases.

On this matter of translation, my revered *Guru*, Sri V. Subbaraayar, whom I met recently, warned me in solemn words to take care not to turn the gold of *The Thiruvaachakam* into base lead in English. He said that it is better for the book to remain untranslated than be subjected to this debasement. Yet no one will deny the need for translating this work, especially into the universal English language, even if my translation is the third of its kind. I have therefore ventured to undertake this work with great trepidation, ever conscious of the solemn warning of my *Guru* which had been given to me on many previous occasions also, ever since I began to write articles on *The Thiruvaachakam* in 1953. But as my three articles in *Tamil Culture* had gained his approval, I hope that this translation of the entire *Thiruvaachakam* too will come up

to the standard prescribed by him and will gain his approval.

This is not an ordinary translation but an interpretative one. The titles and sub-titles of each decad have been elaborately interpreted and their relation with the content of the stanzas has been traced. The importance of the sub-titles has not been fully realised and their meanings have not been fully brought out in any of the commentaries, though Sri N. V. Nelliappa Pillai has tried to fill the gap. It is only when one sees the sub-titles in a row, that one realises that they fall into three distinctive sets corresponding to the second, third and fourth parts of my hypothetical division of *The Thirvaachakam*. We then see how they form the rungs of a ladder to bliss. Though it is a continuous ladder commencing from "Discrimination of the Real" (title of sub-decad 1 of *The Thiruchchathakam*, the 5th decad) and ending with "Cessation of the Passion of the Soul" (the sub-title of *Thirupadaiaatchi*, the 49th decad). The titles of the sub-decads of the *Thiruchchathakam* and that of *Neethaal-vinnappam* form the first section corresponding to the Purgative Way which is the 2nd part of my hypothetical division. The sub-titles of the third part which corresponds to the Illuminative Way, begin where the sub-title of *Neeththal-vinnappam* leaves off, and the sub-titles of the fourth part, which correspond to the Unitive Way, begin where the sub-title of the last decad of the third part leaves. There is a sort of landing at *Kuzhaithhappaththu*, the 33rd decad, in this third section of the ladder, wherefrom, with renewed

vigour, we resume our ascent to the end—union with the Godhead. When the reader meditates on this aspect of *The Thiruvaachakam*, he will realise how inspired Sri Raamachandra Deekshithar was when he called it “a handbook of mystical theology”. My work is nothing but an exposition of his opinion.

For the edification of the reader, the sub-titles have been arranged in the form of a ladder in the illustration on the facing page. The sub-titles of the first four decads form the first four rungs of the ladder. These are the four articles of belief to which an aspirant to the apprehension of the Godhead has to subscribe before he goes up the stairs to Civanhood.

Two eminent scholars have preceded me in the complete translation of this work—Dr. G. U. Pope, an English padre, and Thiruvaachakamani K. M. Balasubramaniam, a Tamilian like me and a native of my own town. Mrs. Ratna Navaratnam of Jaafnaa has written an interpretation of *The Thiruvaachakam* as a testament of Hindu love. In interpreting and translating this work, I have departed from the methods adopted by them. My interpretation is in the nature of developing the mystical handbook aspect of the work and its nature of an autobiographical work on the Pathway to God trodden by Maanikkavaachakar.

Each stanza in *The Thiruvaachakam*, contains many lines and is, in most cases, made up of one single sentence, with several adjectival phrases qualifying Civan on one hand, and Maanikkavaachakar on the other hand, and declaring how such a great Civan bestowed grace on such

a lowly person as Maanikkavaachakar. I have attempted to maintain, as far as possible, in my translation the same construction as in the original, as I feel that this method alone will bring out the full force of the utterances in the stanzas. In doing so, I had to depart from the common usage of 'His' or 'mine' in many places, and use instead 'of Him' or 'of me'.

3. Annamalaipuram
Tennur,
Tiruchiraappalli-17
Tamilnaadu, India.

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G. VANMIKANATHAN.

NOTES ON THE TRANSLATION

In order to enable the reader to follow the flow of the sentences with their several clauses and parentheses, certain key words have been printed in bold type in some of the stanzas.

The title of the decads have been retained as they are in the original. Of course their meanings have been explained in the notes which precede the decads.

Thiruchchitrambalam is a word with which the printing, writing, reading reciting or singing of each decad begins and ends. In fact, any printing etc., of any devotional poem in Tamil should be begun and ended with this word. It corresponds to the *ekaaksharam* (single letter) 'Om' with which the printing etc., of any portion of the Vedaas should begin and end. It is to be used without tagging on 'Om' to it even as '*Namacivaaya*' or '*Civaayanama*' are to be used. In the opinion of my *Guru*, Sri V. Subbarayar, this word refers to the sacred hall of gnosis in the heart and amounts to chanting the second line of the *Civapurānam* of the 1st decad which reads :

“Hallowed be the feet of Him Who nevers departs from my heart even for as long as it takes to wink ! This word – **Thiruchchitrambalam** – condenses in itself the content of verses i to iii of *valli* 1 of Canto VIII of the Chandogya Upanished (see quotation in note to line 35 of decad 1). In this translation, this word is printed at the beginning and end of each decad.

Certain words, such as, Nimalaa, Vimalaa, Amalaa, Pinggakan, Bhujangan, have been retained as such in the translation. Ninmalaa, Nimala and Amalaa, all mean the same thing. I attempted translating these words as "the Immaculate One". But I realised that these words do not mean exactly this. The prefixes 'nin', 'ni' 'vi' and 'a' in these words mean 'free from'. **Malaa** refers to the three **malams**, viz., **aanavam** (ignorance), **kanmam** (karma), and **maayai** (matter) which taint the soul, and from which God is free. Pinggakan and Bhujangan will be explained where they first occur in the work. They are, in a sense, proper names.

The word **ullam** or **ulam** occurs in scores of places in **The Thiruvaachakam**. It has been almost always translated as the 'mind', though in a few places it has been translated as the 'heart' where the context calls for such rendering.

"Medicine" is a word by which Maanikka-vaachakar addresses God in several places in his work. The Tamil word is **marundhu**, and means, in the context, medicine for the disease of birth and death.

The word **ambalam** appears in scores of places in **The Thiruvaachakam**. Unless it is qualified by the word **Thillai**, I have translated it as "the stage (in my heart)", guided thereto by the 2nd line of the first decad which reads ;

"Hallowed be the feet of Him Who never departs from my heart even for as long it takes to wink."

and also by the verse of the Chandogya Upanishad quoted at the end of the note (i) to the same line. Maanikkavaachakar was a contemplative of the highest order and, like Poosalar, built his temple to God in his heart.

A word about the spelling of Tamil words when they are transliterated in English is necessary. The press in which this book is printed has no types with diacritics marks. Even if it had been possible to use such types, very few people would have understood the significance of the letters with diacritic marks, and fewer still would have been able to pronounce the terms properly. In the circumstances, I have spelt the names as close as possible to how they are pronounced in Tamil.

This translation has numerous foot-notes. The reader who skips the foot-notes will lose much; how much, he can discover only by reading a few of the foot-notes.

Wherever there is a note to a line or stanza, that line or stanza is marked with an asterisk placed adjacent to its number.

In addition to numbering each stanza at its end according to its serial number in the decad, the number of the decad and the number of the stanza have been indicated near the inside margin at the top of each page the number on the left hand page is the number of the decad and stanza which begins on that page and the number on the right hand page is

the number of the decad and stanza which ends on that page.

An important note to lines 46 to 48 of decad 1 has been added in Appendix III. There is no reference to this in the note on page 112.

A CORRECTION : The word *Amsol-ambikai* in last line of page 319 should read *Amsol-na yaki* and the word *Anjalaambikai* in first line on page 320 should read *Abhayaambikai*.



CIVAN AS NATARAAJAN

On the facing page there is a picture of Lord Civan as the Dancer—Natarajaan. Maanikkavaachakar worshipped God in the temple of his heart, but on occasions when he worshipped Him externally, he worshipped Him as the Dancer in the golden hall in the temple in Thillai—modern Chidambaram. He does not refer to Him by the name of Natarajaan but as ‘Thillai-k-koothan’, ‘Ambalaththul Aadi’ ‘Ponnam-balavan’ etc., all referring to Lord Civan as the Cosmic Dancer.

Civan as the cosmic dancer is a purely Tamilian concept and images of Civan in the pose of a dancer are found only in temples in Tamilnaadu or in temples built under Tamilian influence in other places.

We reproduce an extract from **The Art of Indian Asia** by Zimmer. (Vol. II, pages 122, 123)*

We have added a paragraph at the end of the extract.

THE EXTRACT

“Civan as Natarajaan, the King of Dancers, is in His manifestation as *Nrtya-murthi*, the cosmic dancer. He is here the embodiment and manifestation of the eternal energy in five activities (*pancha-kriyaa*):

* We are indebted for this extract to the late Sri K. T. Pillai of Calcutta who had it prepared years ago for the use of his son, then studying in Sweden, who owned a bronze icon of Natarajaan which had been presented to him by his father. We have added a paragraph at the end of the extract and a foot-note.

1. *Creation*, pouring forth, unfolding (srsti)
2. *Maintenance* or duration (sthiti)
3. *Destruction* or taking back (samhaaraa)
4. *Concealing*, veiling, hiding, the transcendental essence behind the garb of apparitions (thirobhavaa)
5. *Favouring*, bestowing grace through a manifestation that accepts the devotee (anugrahaa).

The God is dancing on the dwarfish body of the demon, *Apasmaara Purushaa*, "forgetfulness, loss of memory",** who represents ignorance, the destruction of which brings enlightenment, true wisdom, and release from the bondage of existence.

Natarajaa's **upper right hand** carries a small drum shaped like a hourglass; for sound was the first element to evolve in the unfolding of the universe, sound being the characteristic of ether (according to the Indian view) which is the most subtle form of cosmic matter.

** This demon of forgetfulness, called *Muyalakan* in Tamil, may be said to correspond to what Kahlil Gibran calls 'a shapeless pigmy'. He says: "Like the ocean is your god-self. But the god-self does not dwell alone in your being. Much in you is still man, and much in you is not yet man. But a shapeless pigmy that walks asleep in the mist searching for its own awakening."

His **upper left hand** in **ardhachandramudraa** (the half-moon gesture), bears a tongue of flame ; the element of the final destruction of the universe. Thus, in two of His hands are symbolised the balance of creation and destruction

His **lower right hand**, in **abhaya mudraa** (the fear-not gesture) bestows protection,

while His **lower left hand** in the **gaja-hastaa** posture—imitating the outstretched trunk (hastaa) of an elephant (gajaa)—points to the lifted left foot as the refuge or salvation of the devotee. This foot is being worshipped, in order to gain union with God and therewith enlightenment.

Whereas His **right foot** — planted on the demon of forgetfulness, — symbolises Civan's world-creative force driving life - *monaa* - into the sphere of matter, the **lifted foot** symbolises their release. The two feet thus denote the continuous circulation of consciousness into and out of the condition of ignorance.

The **ring of fire** surrounding the figure (**prabha - mandalaa**, called **Thiru-vaasi** in Tamil) symbolises the dance of nature (**prakriti**) which in the life process of the universe and its creatures, and within which there is taking place eternally the dance of the prime mover, the Lord God.

According to the Hindu Caivite view, on the other hand, it is not different from the wisdom-knowledge dance, since it is itself a reflex of the transcendental being of God.

The whole form, finally, may be read as the mystic Om or a, u, m, which is the totality of the world and the psyche in the four states of awareness known as :

- (1) being awake
- (2) being in a dream
- (3) being in dreamless sleep
- (4) being reintegrated in the pure, transcendental essence of divine reality.

Each of the four states is expressed in one of the four parts of A U M ; a, u, m, respectively and the following silence.

Here ends the extract.

The Caiva Siddhaanthins interpret the form, in addition to the above, as representing the mystic five letters, *Na ma ci va i ya*, the *sthoola* (gross) *panchaa-ksharaa* (five letters) and the *sookshma* (subtle) *panchaakasaraa*. Thus says the *Thiruvartupayan* :

Listen, Oh Sir, to the significance of the dancing pose !
 At the sought for holy foot is *na*,
 The adjoining *ma* is the abdomen,
 The shoulder of the extended arm is the *ci*,
 The famed face is *vaa*,
 And see *ya* end in the crown of the head.

* * *

The grasped drum is the *ci*,
 The flung out sweeping hand is *vaa*,
 The fear-dispelling hand is *ya*,
 If one researches into it,

the fire in the hand of the Lord is *na*,
 Note that below the foot where Muiyalakan rests is *ma*.

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PATHWAY TO GOD

THROUGH

TAMIL LITERATURE

(I. Through the Thiruvaachakam)

DEDICATED
TO
MY REVERED GURU
SRI. V. SUBBARAYAR

AN ORIGINAL INTERPRETATION

PREAMBLE

The literature of every civilized language has a number of works which show the pathway to God. The Indian languages have perhaps the largest number of such works, and, among those, the Tamil language tops the list. Dr. R. D. Ranade has written separate books on the Pathway to God through Marathi Literature, Hindi Literature and Cannada Literature respectively. Ever since I studied his book on the "Pathway to God through Cannada Literature", I have been filled with a desire to write such a book for Tamil Literature. That desire is now partially fulfilled in this book. It does not deal with all the works in the Tamil language which show the path to God, but with only one of them – *The Thiruvaachakam* – and offers an interpretation and complete translation of that work which relates in one comprehensive system of thought the experiences of St. Maanikka-vaachakar, the author of that work, in his journey on the Pathway to God specially blazed by him.

Before my desire is completely fulfilled, two or three more books should be written, one on the path shown by the first seven *Thirumurais* and the tenth *Thirumurai* – the *Thirumandiram*, – another on the path shown by Thaayumaanavar and Raamalinga Swaamigal and a third on the path shown by the Aalwaars. There could be another book on the path shown by the Siddhars. I hope others will come forward to write these books.

But even if these additional books are not written, *The Thiruvaachakam* alone will suffice to show the Pathway to God through Tamil Literature as it is fully representative of all the other Tamil works on the subject which do not differ from it in fundamentals but only in details.

Aldous Huxley says :

“Perennial Philosophy is primarily concerned with the one divine Reality substantial to the manifold world of things and lives and minds. But the nature of this one Reality is such that it will not be directly and immediately apprehended, except by those who have chosen to fulfil certain conditions, making themselves loving, pure in heart and poor in spirit In every age, there have been men and women who chose to fulfil the conditions upon which alone, as a matter of brute empirical fact, such immediate knowledge can be had; and of these a few have left accounts of the Reality they were enabled to apprehend, and have tried to relate, in one comprehensive system of thought, the given facts of this experience with the given facts of their other experiences.”*

Maanikkavaachakar, the author of *The Thiruvaachakam*, is one of those few who have left such accounts in one comprehensive system of thought. The Tamil people are blessed indeed to have *The Thiruvaachakam* in the Tamil language. For it is not

* THE PERENNIAL PHILOSOPHY by Aldous Huxley, Chatto & Windus, London (1950).

every language which can boast of a work of this nature or, for that matter, of a book like the *Thirukkural*.

Though *The Thiruvaachakam* is composed in very simple language and presents no difficulty even to an ordinary reader, yet the thought content is difficult to understand without instruction from some one well-versed in *Caiva Siddhaantaa* in particular and Hinduism –or, to give it its correct name, *Sanaatana Dharma* i. e., Perennial Philosophy – in general.

Faith in one God, hope of deliverance for each and every soul from the cycle of births through rebirths and belief in the Law of Karma, these are the three basic teachings of *The Thiruvaachakam* even as they are of the *Thirukkural*. / Rebirth is not a matter of belief just as the sun is not a matter of belief. It is an incontrovertible fact – an indisputable need. (No soul is eternally damned.) By a series of births it gains the Godhead. “To be free to choose and to choose God’s way is all that makes us different from the animals.” said the grandfather of biographer Grace Nies Fletcher in *In My Father’s House*. The Law of Karma slowly but inexorably teaches man, to make this free choice that he may be freed of the jurisdiction of the Law of Karma. As Dag Hammarsjold says: “We are not permitted to choose the frame of our destiny. But what we put in is ours.....”. This is the way of life which this work teaches us. Love and righteous conduct are the fundamentals of this kind of life. Deliverance of the

soul from the taint of the three *malams* (taint of ignorance, karma and matter) and integration with the Godhead are the aims of this kind of life.

MAANIKKAVAACHAKAR POET & MYSTIC

Early Life

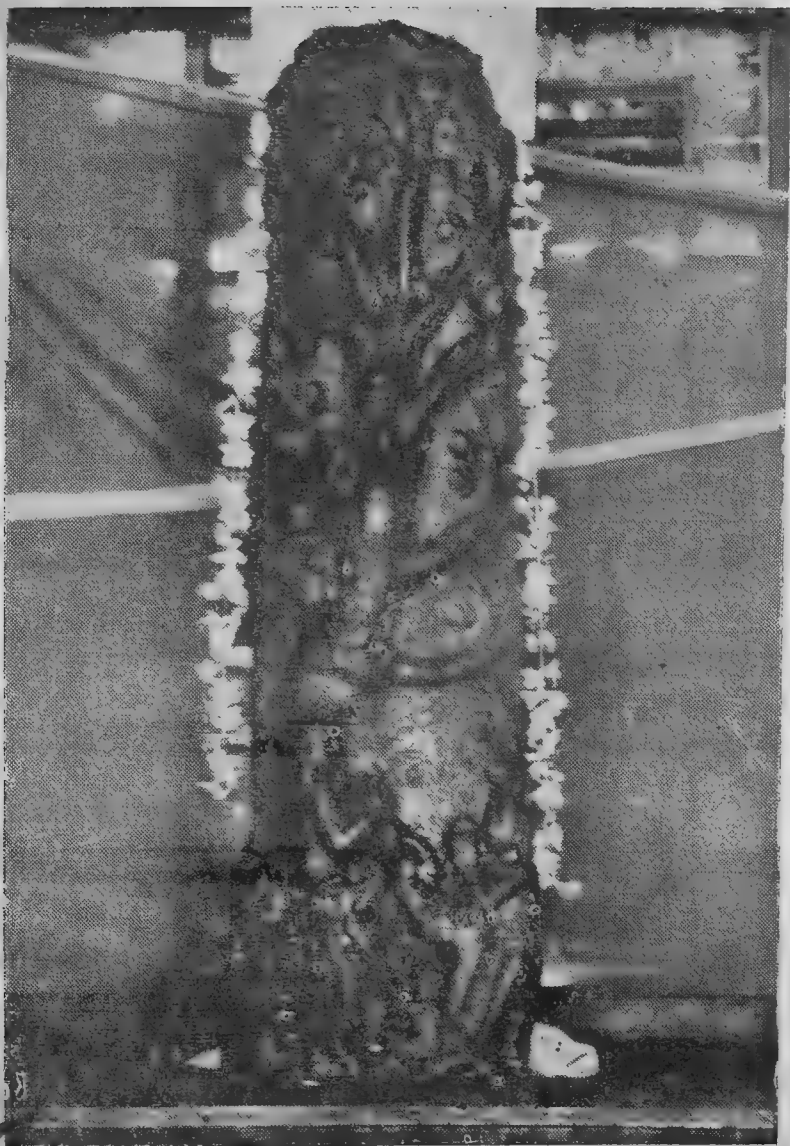
Maanikkavaachakar, the author of *The Thiruvaachakam* is said to have been born in Vaadhavoor a village seven miles from modern Madurai on the banks of the river *Vaigai*, in a brahmin family which had, for several generations, provided the kings of Paandinaadu with ministers, so much so that the family (kulam) was called *amaaththiya kulam* (the ministerial family). He was named, tradition says, Vaadhavooran.

The late Maraimalai Adigal places him in the third century A. D. However, his date is immaterial to our purpose. Like the life of many a saint in India and elsewhere too, the life of our saint too is enveloped by a web of fable and legend.

True to his family tradition, Maanikkavaachakar became very learned in the religious and secular fields. His fame reached the then ruling Paandiyan King who promptly made him, who was not yet out of his teens, a minister of the kingdom.

The Guru

On one occasion, the king sent Maanikkavaachakar to buy horses for the cavalry. On the way, Maanikkavaachakar heard of a great saint camped at a place called Perunthurai, and went to pay him his



*By gracious courtesy of His Holiness
The Mahaaisannidhaanam of Thiruvavaduthurai Mutt.*

The picture on the reverse is a photograph of an icon in the temple at Aavadaiyaarkoil (Thirupperunthurai of old) representing Lord Civan seated as a *Guru* under the Kurundha tree and giving initiation to Maanikkavaachakar into the fold of His devotees.

respects. Shall we say that this was his undoing? Yes, undoing as a minister of the Paandiyan King; but no, as far as his spiritual life was concerned. That was the day on which, through the rays of the benign glance of the saint, the strands of the bonds which secured Maanikkavaachakar to the unceasing cycle of births began to be burnt away. / He forgot the king's mission, forgot his position, his duty and responsibility, forgot himself completely and began to squander the money which the king had given him for the purchase of horses on the reconstruction of the temple of the place. Word reached the king of the vagaries of Maanikkavaachakar, and he promptly recalled him to court. Maanikkavaachakar woke to the rude realities of his plight and appealed to the saint who had by now initiated him into the spiritual life and had become his *Guru*. The *Guru* reassured him and bade him go and tell the king that the horses would come in a day or two. Maanikkavaachakar did so, and here began the long trail of his deliverance, deliverance from the bonds of worldly affairs, deliverance from the bonds of I and mine, and, ultimately, deliverance from the bonds of birth. Let us leave him, facing the irate king and turn to the saint who walked into his life at Perunthurai and took possession of him, body and soul and belongings as well. Later, in a moment of travail, Maanikkavaachakar was to sing thus :

Oh Lord, eternal like a hill !

On that very day when You enslaved me,

Did you not appropriate my soul, body and belongings-

Everything indeed ?

Oh Lord with eight shoulders and three eyes !

Can anything stand in my way today ?

Do You good, do You ill ;

Have I mastery over this ?

33. 7

In Caiva Siddhaantaa theology, God is never born through the womb of a woman ; but He often materialises out of the ether in a human form in order to help His devotees, and disappears as soon as His mission is over. Thus He often comes as a *guru*. / The word ' *guru* ' has no equivalent in English. The word means one who leads a person out of darkness. The words 'preceptor', 'instructor', 'director of souls', all these fall far short of the image which the word ' *guru* ' evokes in the mind of a reader of the Hindu scriptures. The *guru* is indeed next to God, nay, often equal to God, in the spiritual life of a *mumukshu*, an aspirant for the apprehension of the Godhead. In Hindu tradition, God Himself often comes down as a *guru* to claim a soul. He comes when the particular soul has attained a state of spiritual maturity which is called "*malaparipaakam*" or '*iru vinai-oppu*', a state of fitness for the grace of God to descend on the soul. The saint who came to Perunthurai for the sake of claiming the soul of Maanikkavaachakar was God Himself. Maanikkavaachakar affirms this in no uncertain terms in lines 55 to 64 of decad 3. He sings :

Behold the Lord whom everyone is entitled to apprehend !

Behold Civan* whom even the *devaas* do not know !

Behold Him with the aspects of male, female and the neuter !

* Civan — Ci is pronounced as in Civics. The word is commonly spelt "SIVAN" or "SHIVAN".

Behold Him whom even I saw with my eyes !
 Behold the Ambrosia which yields grace in abundance !
 Note that I saw the greatness of His mercy !
 (For) behold He stepped on earth with His rosy feet (for my sake) !
 Note that I was convinced that He was Civan !
 Note that He in His Grace enslaved me !
 Behold Him Who has Her with blue-lotus-like eyes as a part of Him !
 Behold simultaneously Her and Him !

The Thiruvaachakam is full of references to this *guru*-disciple relationship, this liege-lord and liege relationship, which later turns into the lover and beloved relationship where Maanikkavaachakar is the bride of the Lord.

We often hear a person — an aspirant for the spiritual life — say that he is seeking a guru. A person who says so speaks out of ignorance. /In the realm of spiritual life, it is the guru who seeks out the disciple even as a cow whose udder is swollen with milk seeks out its calf.) This is not some fabled tradition, but an actual fact as has been time and again established from time immemorial right down to the present day. And so indeed it happened in the case of Maanikkavaachakar. / Again and again, almost in every decad, Maanikkavaachakar reiterates this fact of God seeking him out and pouring grace into him. In fact, he throws the entire burden of redeeming him on God because it was God Who, of His own accord, sought him out, and took him under His over-lordship. In the very first decad, *The Civapuraanam*, he exploits this situation in which God had let Himself in for a very onerous task of redeeming a recalcitrant devotee.

Recalcitrant he was by his own admission. In the 4th stanza of the 6th decad he pleads thus :

“Do not abandon me who, while You with Your extended hand of mercy caught hold of me, have slipped away hither and flits about (eluding You).”

In the first decad he says :

For the sake of such a me, who, Oh Vimalaa,
 due to a thwarting mind,
 Was devoid of the grace of merging in You with love
 and of thawing and melting within my (stony) heart,
 You graciously came down on earth
 and showed Your far-famed feet
 To me, Your slave, fallen lowlier than a cur,
 Oh Truth with tenderness surpassing a mother's !
 (lines 56 to 61)

In line 74 of the same decad he sings :

“Oh my Father and Noble Lord who pulled me (unto You)
 And assumed lordship over me !”

In the 6th stanza of decad 33 we hear him declaring thus :

Of Your own volition You assumed lordship over me,
 therefore, whatever, at Your pleasure, You graciously do,
 The same I seek ; but should there remain in me
 any trace of a trait of desiring something
 Of my own volition,
 is not that too Your sweet will ?

I can go on quoting scores of such references, but I shall content myself with quoting only one more. In the 10th stanza of decad 38, he emphatically denies any effort of his own. He sings :

Did I indeed perform *thavam* (ascetic deeds),
and Ci-vaa-ya-na-ma gained to chant ?

Civan, the mighty Lord,

Who tastes sweet like honey and delicious ambrosia,
Of His own accord came and entered my heart,
and to me, His slave, did the gracious favour
Of impelling me

to castigate my carnal life and hate it. 38.10

Of course, a life of contemplation (*thavam*) is possible only to those who have a vocation for it. Thiruvalluvar says :

Thavam is possible only to those who have a vocation for it ;
It is vain for those without that to undertake *thavam*.

Thomas Merton, a great contemplative – *thapasvi* – of this century, has a lot to say of this vocation in his autobiography called 'The Seven Storey Mountain.' In fact, an unimaginative monk delayed by many years Merton's accession to the contemplative life by telling him brusquely that he had no vocation for that type of life. This caused Merton many years of misery.

Grace

But a vocation too is only bestowed by God. Maanikkavaachakar underscores this truth in these words :

“ By His grace His feet worshipping ”
in line 18 of the 1st decad and again three lines later thus :

On the One with an eye in His forehead,
beckoning me with His gracious glance,
I, coming nigh,
those beyond-reach-of-thought notable feet worshipped.

That this is true now as then is clear from the words of the fourteenth century unknown author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* * and from the words of Rev. Fr. Johnston of the present century who profusely quotes from the *Cloud of Unknowing* in his book *The Mysticism of the Cloud of Unknowing* **. Thus Fr. Johnston, under the heading, "Vocation to Contemplation" :

"The author (of the *Cloud of Unknowing*) is well aware of the dangers of entering the cloud of forgetting before one's time. One of his reasons for insisting that his book may not be given to everyone is his fear that some young person, filled with good will, on hearing of mystical things may imagine that he is called to the contemplative life and end up in a condition that is 'madness and no wisdom'.

"Even good people must be careful", he continues "not to enter this path prematurely; they must wait for the call of God. The Good Shepherd calls into the sheepfold those whom He will and He does so quite gratuitously Those not called must patiently and humbly wait outside. Indeed the author (of the *Cloud of Unknowing*) protests that he himself cannot teach contemplation, nor can any man. He says :

* *The Cloud of Unknowing* published by Early English Text Society, Original Series 218, Edited by Phyllis Hodgson, London 1944.

** *The Mysticism of the Cloud of Unknowing* by Rev. Fr. William Johnston S. J., of Sophia University in Tokyo. Published by Desclee Company (New York) 1967.

‘ And if thou ask me by what means thou shalt come to this work, I beseech Almighty God of his great courtesy to teach thee himself. For truly I do well to let thee know that I cannot tell thee. And this is no wonder. Because it is the work of only God, specially wrought in whatever soul he liketh, without any merit of the same soul. For without it no saint or angel can think to desire it ’.

Johnston continues and says :

“ Thus the grace is given by God alone, as he liketh, where he liketh, and when he liketh.”

Millenniums earlier, the Katha Upanishad said :

“ The goal which all Vedaas proclaim ... it is Om. This syllable is Brahman. The Aatman (i.e., Brahman), smaller than the smallest and greater than the greatest, dwells in the heart of the creatures. This Aatman cannot be attained by the Vedaas, nor by intellect, nor even by much hearing the sacred scriptures : by him it is attained whom It chooses.”

As Epictetus puts it :

“ Surely God chooses His servants at birth or, perhaps, even before birth.”

Good-bye to Worldly Life

Let us revert to Manikkavaachakar before the irate king. He told the king, just as he was bidden by his *guru*, that the horses would come in a day or two. True enough they came, brought there by an Arab farrier,

who was none else than Lord Civan Himself. The horses were stabled along with the rest of the king's horses; but in the night the newly arrived animals turned into foxes which harried and maimed the rest of the horses. The king was enraged when he was told about this. The farrier was nowhere to be seen. The king threw Maanikkavaachakar into prison. Again the Lord came to the rescue of his liege, and made the perennially dry bed of the river *Vaigai* fill with a never-before-seen flood which began to devastate the king's realm. The king ordered the people to send one man from each family to raise bunds to contain the flood waters. One old woman, a seller of steamed rice rolls, had neither a male member in her family nor could she hire anyone, as every available man had been engaged already by others. In her plight, Lord Civan came to her as a cooly and offered to work for her, provided she gave as wages the crumbs fallen off the rolls she had cooked. She agreed, and the divine labourer went to the work-spot with spade and basket, and soon busied himself with loafing about the area or dozing off on a sand bank with the basket for a pillow or playfully demolishing the work of others under the pretence of helping them. The king who came on a round of inspection noticed this frisky truant, who was now bent almost double before him in feigned humility, and with his royal cane gave a cut across the back of the miscreant. And lo! the blow fell on all the creatures of the world, man and beast. The king realised his error and released Maanikkavaachakar who promptly bade goodbye to all worldly ties and

set out on his journey on the path of no return, the *meendum vaaraa vazhi*, the path of no return to the cycle of births.

That day is a red letter day in the spiritual history of Tamilnaadu. That day led Maanikkavaachakar stage by stage to the Godhead, and thereby to release from the cycle of births; that day Maanikkavaachakar the poet and mystic was born.

Mystic

Who is a mystic? In the words of Thomas Merton, which I have slightly changed in the matter of tenses only to suit the context,

“a mystic is one who surrenders to a power of love that is greater than human and advances toward God in a darkness that goes beyond the light of reason and of human conceptual knowledge. Furthermore, there is no infallible way of guaranteeing the mystic against every mistake; he can never be perfectly sure of any human technique. (Only the grace of God can protect him and guide him.) In other words, when we speak of mysticism, we speak of an area in which man is no longer completely in command of his own life, (his own mind, and of his own will.) Yet at the same time his surrender is to a God who is ‘more intimate to him than his own self’ and, therefore, mysticism precludes (real alienation.) In mystical union, God and man, while remaining no doubt metaphysically distinct, are practically and experimentally ‘one Spirit.’ ”*

* SEEDS OF CONTEMPLATION by Thomas Merton, (A Dell Book).

Maanikkavaachakar, according to the above definition, is a mystic par excellence. His surrender to a love that is greater than human is something extraordinarily remarkable even in the history of mysticism. Kahlil Gibran, the Lebanese mystic of this century, speaking of love says :

Like sheaves of corn he gathers you unto himself.

He threshes you to make you naked.

He sifts you to free you from your husks.

He grinds you to whiteness.

He kneads you until you are pliant.

And then he assigns you to his sacred fire that you may become
sacred bread for God's sacred feast,

All these things shall love do unto you that you may know the
secrets of your heart, and in that knowledge become a fragment
of Life's heart. *

All this and more did love do unto Maanikkavaachakar.
He sings :

On the One without a peer coming Himself

And relating His *I alone am* nature,

That people like me may pay heed to it,

And on His challengingly hailing me

And assuming lordship over me,

And, in His grace, showing Himself to me

In the guise of a brahmin,

I, with uncloying love melting my bones,

Wailed with loud lamentations,

And, clamouring louder

Than the surf of the billowing sea,

Fell down with my head all topsy-turvy,

And rolled and wailed.

* THE PROPHET by Kahlil Gibran, (William Heinemann Ltd.)

Madder than madmen, more gleeful than frenzied men,
 To the puzzlement of the citizens
 And the wonderment of the hearers,
 Worse than a rutting elephant,
 Which would not be mounted,
 I was beside myself. (*lines 146 to 156 of 3rd decad*)

In another context Maanikkavaachakar sings thus :

When in the heart of contemplatives
 Thought of God was born,
 And on that Being, Who is free from hate,
 Contemplation set in,
 Six crores of delusive powers
 Severally began their illusive play.
 Neighbours—close friends all—gathered round
 And talked atheism till their tongues became calloused:
 Relatives, the ancestral herd of cattle,
 Seized them, implored them,
 And became agitated :
 By and large, penance itself as supreme,
 Brahmins glibly proved by Vedic texts :
 Sectarian disputants,
 Claiming their respective creeds only as perfect,
 Clamorously clashed (with each other) :
 The tornado called staunch *maayaa-vaadam*—
 (The dogma that the world is but an empty dream)—
 Swirled and blew and roared,
 The while the conflicting cultural deadly poison
 Of Epicurianism — the dazzling doughty snake —
 Came and joined forces.
 While, thereby, several great delusions
 Encompassed the contemplatives,

They swerved not,
 But unflaggingly held on to their faith.
 Like wax faced with fire,
 With melting heart they worshipped, wept, trembled,
 Danced, shouted, sang, prayed :
 Even like the artisan's vice and fools
 Who never let go what they catch hold of,
 Due to unintermitting pure love,
 Becoming firm in faith
 Like a nail driven into a green tree,
 With tears increasingly trickling,
 And mind in a whirl like the sea,
 With heart sore and body shivering in unison,
 Eschewing shyness,
 And assuming people's scornful words
 As ornament verily,
 Losing all casuistry, their intelligence in a whirl,
 With the aimed-at-goal (of deliverance from birth)
 As the supreme miracle,
 They remained unswerving in mind :
 And lowing and all atwitter like a calved cow,
 Not thinking of another god even in a dream,
 Not despising as a little thing
 The greatness of the grace of Him of unique heaven
 In coming down on earth and becoming *guru* supreme,
 His sacred twin feet,
 Like their shadow which,
 Now fore, now aft, but never knows separation,
 They never grew tired of :
 Their very bones softened and melted,
 Their hearts yearned with sigh after sigh ;

The river called love overflowed its banks thither;*
 Their goodly senses coalesced,
 And they clamoured "Oh Lord, our Sire" :
 While their speech stumbled,
 And the hair on their bodies stood on end,
 Their hands, the flowers,
 Folded in worship into shape of lotus-bud,
 And their hearts, flowers all, blossomed out :
 Their eyes flushed with delight,
 Droplets dewing on them :
 While thus unswerving love all day long they cherished,
 their very Mother, Oh Lord, You became
 And brought them up. —(*lines 42 to 86 of decad 4*)

Maanikkavaachakar's incessant prayer to God was to grant him love towards Him. He sings :

In pretence, imitating Your devotees,
 through their midst,
 To enter the land of deliverance,
 I rush in a great hurry :
 Oh splendid gem-set golden Hill !
 Unintermitting love unto You
 To take root in the core of my heart and melt it,
 do You grant in Your grace, Oh my Owner ! (5-11)

If ever any contemplative can be said to have been totally and exclusively filled with the "blind stirring of love", which the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* speaks of, we can unhesitatingly say that Maanikka-vaachakar was so filled.

* thither=towards the sacred twin feet.

Of his surrender to a God who is more intimate to him than his own self, I need but quote only a few stanzas, out of several which I can quote, to establish this point. Maanikkavaachakar was a caivite saint, if any mystic, even after immediate and intimate apprehension of the Real, can still be classified under the label of an institutional religion. But he surpasses even the Vaishnavites in the matter of surrender, *Saranaagathi*, to God. In two successive poems in the *Kuzhaiththapaththu*, a very highly significant decad in *The Thiruvaachakam*, he sings thus :

Me a cur, the basest of curs,
 You took a fancy for,
 And of Your own accord enslaved me.
 Other than leaving in your hands
 This matter of delusive birth,
 is it for me to research into it ?
 Is mine the authority here ?
 Thrust me into a body
 Or set me under Your anklet-girt feet (as You please),
 Oh Lord with an eye in the forehead ! —(33-8)

He follows with another song which goes further than the former in surrender to the Divine will. He sings :

Oh Lord with an eye in the forehead !
 I have, to the delight of my eyes,
 Beheld Your anklet-girt feet.
 Henceforth,
 Instead of contemplating on them day and night
 to the exclusion of all other thought,
 Shall I, Oh my Father,

brood on shedding this body on earth
And entering the haven of Your feet ?

Fine, indeed, is my serfdom to You. —(33-9)

Maanikkavaachakar's surrender was total without
reservations. He sings :

Abide in me and enslave me,
sell me, mortgage me, but this apart,
Do not turn me away —

me a stranger who has sought your hospitality —

Oh Lord Who ate the poison
as exceedingly sweet ambrosia !

Oh King of eternal Uththarakosamangai !

Oh Medicine to those

Who are crippled

by the disease of birth ! — (6-18)

THE THIRUVAACHAKAM

—AN INTERPRETATION

A Hand-book of Mystical Theology.

The Thiruvaachakam, then, is the story of Maanikka-
vaachakar's love for God—a love that is greater
than human—and of his surrender to a God Who is
(more intimate to him than his own self.) On these
premises, Ramachandra Deekshithar, the author of
Studies in Tamil Literature and History is more than
justified in calling *The Thiruvaachakam* a handbook of
mystical theology. He says :

“*The Thiruvaachakam* relates an autobiographical
story of the different stages of Maanikkavaachakar's
spiritual life and experience which ultimately enabled
him to attain bliss ineffable and eternal. It is a
torrential outflow of ardent religious feelings and

emotions in rapturous songs and melodies. The work may be regarded as a convenient handbook on mystical theology."

Dr. R. D. Ranade, the author of three books of *Pathway to God*, through Marathi Literature, Cannadaa Literature, and Hindi Literature respectively, says of Maanikkavaachakar :

"In him we see the upspringing of a natural devotion to God, which through a consciousness of his faults, rises by gradations to the apprehension of the Godhead. In his great poem he makes us aware, as Dr. Carpenter puts it, of his first joy and exaltation, his subsequent waverings, his later despondencies, his consciousness of faults, his intensive shame and his final recovery and triumph."

The Thiruvaachakam – an Upanishad

The Thiruvaachakam is not merely a handbook of mystical theology, it is an Upanishad — as much an Upanishad as any of the ten principal Upanishads.

The Four, as Maanikkavaachakar, Sambandar, Appar and Sundarar are lovingly called in Tamilnaadu, were the spearheads of a revolutionary movement in matters religious and spiritual in the south. A decadence had set in, in the life of the people. The apostles of other religions — Buddhism and Jainism — found their opportunity in this very favourable atmosphere and seized the minds of the people with their tenets and beliefs, and had very soon made converts of the kings of the land, after which the

conversion of the people was but the enforcement of a royal decree. The people were confused and torn among themselves. These four saints came to them as the leaders of a spiritual renaissance in Tamilnaadu. They did not come to establish any new institutional or revealed religion. They came to restate the great truth — the perennial philosophy — and to lead the people toward the Godhead. It is therefore that we find all their outpourings of song mystical in character.

R. D. Ranade, writing in his introduction to *Mysticism in Maharashtra*,* says :

“A mystical vein of thought has been present throughout the development of Indian Philosophy from the age of the Upanishads downwards; but it assumes an extraordinary importance when we come to the second millennium of the Christian era which sees the birth of the practical spiritual philosophy taught by the mystics of the various provinces of India.”

But even five to six centuries before this period, Tamilnaadu saw the birth of a mysticism with a genius of its own.

Discussing the difference between the mysticism of the Upanishads and that of the Middle Age, Ranade says :

*History of Indian Philosophy : Vol : 7. Indian Mysticism-Mysticism in Maharashtra (1933) by R. D. Ranade, Professor of Philosophy, University of Allahabad.

“The mysticism of the Upanishads is different from the mysticism of the Middle Age, in as much as it was merely a tidal wave of the philosophy of the ancient seers while the other was the natural outcome of the heart, full of piety and devotion, the consciousness of sin and misery and final desire to assimilate with the divine. The Upanishadic mysticism was a naive philosophical mysticism; the mysticism of the Middle Age was a mysticism which hated all philosophical explanations or philosophical imaginings as useless, when contrasted with the appropriation of the Real. The Upanishadic mysticism was the mysticism of men who lived in cloisters far away from the bustle of humanity, and who, if they permitted any company at all, permitted only the company of their disciples. The mysticism of the Middle Age was a mysticism which engrossed itself in the practical upliftment of the human kind, based on the sure foundation of one's own perfect spiritual development. The Upanishadic mysticism did not come forward with the deliberate purpose of mixing with men in order to ameliorate their spiritual condition. The business of the mystic of the Middle Age consisted in mixing with the ordinary run of mankind, with sinners, with pariahs, with women, with people who cared not for the spiritual life, with people who even had mistaken notions about it, with, in fact, everybody who wanted, be it ever so little, to appropriate the Real.

“We may say,” concludes Ranade, “that as we pass from the Upanishadic mysticism to the mysti-

cism of the Middle Age, we see the spiritual life brought from the hidden cloisters to the market place."

Thus arose, as Ranade says :

" a Democratic Mysticism which laid stress upon the vernaculars as the medium of mystical teaching as opposed to the classical mysticism of ancient times, which had Sanscrit as its language of communication. It was a democratisation not merely in language, but also in the spirit of teaching, and we see how mysticism became the property of all."

These differences should not be allowed, however, to lead us to the conclusion that Maanikkavaachakar reveals something different from or antagonistic to the teachings of the world's earliest mystics—the Seers of the Upanishads.

To quote Ranade again :

"The mystics of all ages and countries form an eternal divine society. There are no religious, no communal, no national prejudice among them. Time and place have nothing to do with the eternal and infinite character of their mystical experience....They have the same teachings about the name of God, the fire of devotion, the nature of Self-realisation. It is only due to overweening superciliousness that people regard the mystics of one country as different from, or superior to, the mystics of other lands or faiths. If all men are equal before God and if men have got the same 'deiform faculty', which enables

them to 'see God face to face', then, there is no meaning in saying that there is a difference between the quality of God-realisation of some as apart from the God-realisation of others. It is true that there may be physical, mental, and temperamental differences, but there is no difference in the quality of their mystical or intuitive realisation."

The Thiruvaachakam, therefore, makes available to the people of Tamilnaadu the same pathway to the Godhead even as the Upanishads do. If there is a distinction, it is this, — the Upanishads state the proposition, *The Thiruvaachakam*, furnishes the proof.

The Thiruvaachakam, therefore, is not a mere *ad hoc* collection of devotional poems. It is a treatise on the theology of mysticism and an Upanishad. But treatises are usually extremely dull, but not so *The Tiruvaachakam*. The reason is that it is not an intellectual work, but a spontaneous outpouring of the heart's travail and triumph in most melodious song. The very elements of democratisation which are *The Tiruvaachakam's* speciality are also the cause of people's failure to realise as well its identity with the perennial truths revealed in the Upanishads, as the comprehensive system of thought — the book of mystical theology. The cadence of its songs, the unique sweetness of the Tamil language, the use of simple household words to whose pregnant and poignant thought-content the Tamil mind has become insensible through over-familiarity, these factors contrive to make us unaware of the great heritage we have in *The Thiruvaachakam*.

Its flood of devotional outpourings has submerged the scintillating gems of spiritual teachings even as a torrent of tears hides the iris of the eyes. As Aldous Huxley says :

“Familiarity with traditional hallowed writings tends to breed, not indeed contempt, but something which, for practical purposes, is almost as bad, a stupor of the spirit, an inward deafness to the meaning of the sacred words.”

If I can compare *The Thiruvaachakam* to any works in the English language, I can compare it only to the *Psalms* of David and to the *Imitation of Christ* by Thomas a Kempis. The entire *Thiruvaachakam* is in the form of direct speech, even like the *Psalms* of David and the entreaties of Thomas a Kempis. (God is addressed in the second person.) This enables us to appropriate the poems and make them our very own, identify ourselves with the thoughts of the poems and make them instruments of our personal appeal to God about our own spiritual problems.

The Thirvaachakam is, no doubt, a story, a history, an autobiography of a love greater than human, but for lack of human conceptual phraseology, it is cast in the form of an intensely human love-play between a bride and a bridegroom, in which Maanikkavaachakar is cast in the role of the bride. This concept is particularly eastern, but western mystics are not strangers to this role. Among all the commentators, only Nava-neetha Krishna Bhaarithiyaar of Jaffna has stated that the entire *Thiruvaachakam* is indeed a work belonging

to the *ahaththurai*, i. e., literature dealing with love—in this case, not earthy but ethereal, spiritual, divine.

Architectonics of The Thiruvaachakam

I must give here a brief sketch of the architectonics of *The Thiruvaachakam*. It has 51 decads (poems of ten stanzas each, but not always so in *The Thiruvaachakam*), comprising 658 stanzas.

Unlike in the case of the decads of Thirugnana-sambandar, Thirunaavukkarasar and Sundarar, the places where the decads of *The Thiruvaachakam* were sung are not of much importance. We may, however, note that they were sung in seven places. 20 decads are said to have been sung at Thiru-p-perunthurai, 25 at Thillai, 6 at Uththarakosamangai, 2 at Thiruvannamalai, one each at Thirukkazhukkundram, Thiruththonipuram (Seerkaazhi) and Thiruvaaroor. When or in what order Maanikkavaachakar travelled to these places is not known. It is clear, however, that he began at Thirupperunthurai and ended in Thillai, and that he shuttled frequently between Thirupperunthurai and Thillai.

The Thiruvaachakam is not divided into books or cantos, but if one were to do so, it can be divided into four parts. The first part will comprise the first four decads which count as a stanza each and serve as a prologue to the work.) The second part will comprise the *Thiruchchatakam* and *Neeththal Vinnappam*, the 5th and 6th decads, 150 stanzas in all. The third part will comprise sixteen decads beginning with *Thiruvempaavai*, the 7th decad, and ending with *Koil-tiruppa-*

thikam, the 22nd decad, a total of 243 stanzas. The fourth part will comprise the remaining 29 decads, a total of 261 stanzas.

St Ignatius divides his 'Spiritual Exercises' into three ways of life — the purgative way, the illuminative way and the unitive way. Readers of *The Thiruvaa-chakam* will see how remarkably the second, third and fourth parts correspond to the purgative, illuminative and unitive way respectively. In the *Thiruchchatakam* and *Neeththal Vinnappam* our mystic purges himself of all his sins. In the next part of sixteen decads, he gains illumination and in the last and fourth part he treads the unitive way — the path to union with the Godhead.

PROLOGUE

Though all (the four decads) of my hypothetical first part of the *The Thiruvaachakam* may be generally called a prologue, the first decad, the *Civapuraanam*, is the prologue proper, corresponding to what is called in Tamil, the *Tharrchirappu-p-paayiram*

It is, however, more than this. It deals with the Godhead, the nameless and formless God, '*oru naamam ore uruvam ondrum illaathan*', the Brahman, the God Within of Aldous Huxley. When I say that it deals with the Godhead, do not imagine a dry as dust dissertation in abstruse language on the abstract Brahman. For simplicity and sweetness, for sheer poetry and telling imagery, for music and melody, this decad is unsurpassed.

The second decad deals with God with forms and names, the many *moorthies* enshrined in the temples along the length and breadth of Tamilnaadu. It does much more than this. It is a first person account by Maanikkavaachakar of the manner in which God enslaved him and other devotees before him stage by stage at various places by diverse means, all the time pouring grace on them and drawing them closer and closer for the ultimate embrace in eternal union.

The third decad sings of the immanent God, God in creation. Rev. Fr. Johnston calls this aspect a metaphysical kind of wisdom, by which one can rise from the knowledge of creatures by causality to the Supreme Being Who is the source of existence. The sun, the moon, the fire, the ether, the wind, the streams, and the earth, all give a true analogical knowledge of God. Maanikkavaachakar sings :

The day after day rising sun He endows with effulgence,
 The resplendent moon He endows with coolness,
 He creates the heat in the fire of great might,
 To the pure ether He gives pervasiveness,
 And the glorious wind receives its energy from Him,
 To the streams that meander in the shade,
 It is He who gives them their sweet savour,
 He endows the earth with its firmness.
 Thus and thus many crores of things and more,
 In such and such measure (as befits each),
 With their respective qualities He endows.

(Lines 20 to 28 of decad 3)

The first three decads cover man's concept of God in its entirety. The fourth decad is a synthesis of all the three previous decads. / In this decad of 225 lines Maanikkavaachakar swings from one aspect to another, now praising the Godhead, now the form-endowed God, and now the immanent God, and ends with the following stirring lines :

Oh infinitely infinite Effulgence ! Obeisance to You !

Obeisance to You ! Obeisance to You !

Oh Lord adorned with snakes !

Obeisance to You ! Obeisance to You !

Oh Ancient Cause ! Obeisance to You ! Obeisance to You !

Victory, Victory to You ! Obeisance to You !

(Lines 222-225)

THE PURGATIVE WAY

The second part will comprise the fifth and sixth decads, the *Tiruchchathakam* and the *Neeththal Vinnappam* i. e., the *Sacred Hundred* and the *Forsake Me Not Plaint*.

Maanikkavaachakar does not assume the role of the bride overtly right from the beginning of his initiation by the *Guru*, Lord Civan himself, under the *kurundha* tree in Perunthurai. Tradition and dogma had him in their grip, rightly enough, I should say. For, to all but a rare few, the road to unitive knowledge of God is, in the beginning, through the usual course of spiritual disciplines, faith, dogma and tradition. In setting out the qualifications of the reader who is fit to read the *Cloud of Unknowing*, its anonymous author says :

“ He should be one who does all he can to help himself in this life by a faithful heeding of moral and spiritual disciplines, and had been doing so for a long time.”

Maanikkavaachakar relates his life of such moral spiritual disciplines in the 5th decad.

The section on asceticism in *The Thirukkural* has thirteen chapters, nine of which deal with the spiritual disciplines which an aspirant to asceticism should follow. The *Thiruchchatakam* in *The Thiruvaachakam* has hundred stanzas divided into ten sub-decads of ten stanzas each, seven of which deal with the disciplines an aspirant for the apprehension of the Godhead has to follow. The remaining three sub-decads describe “ the assurance of a comforting and mighty presence which grows on one more and more until one realises that it is God revealing Himself in a light that is painful to one’s nature ”.

The sub-decads have been given their own titles. They are :

Discrimination of the Real

Acquainting God of one’s aspirations

Abandoning discursive method of knowing

Purification of the soul

Rendering a fit return for grace received

Purification of Experience

Pleading for divine compassion

Being steeped in bliss

Ecstatic bliss

Transcendent bliss

The Thiruchchathakam is a manual of instructions for the conquest of the self and the apprehension of the one Reality. A study of the hundred stanzas will show that the varied disciplines are indeed formidable. The disciplines related in these stanzas appear to correspond to what Thomas Merton calls "the most usual entrance to contemplation". He says :

"The most usual entrance to contemplation is through (a desert of aridity) in which, although you see nothing and feel nothing and are conscious only of a certain interior suffering and anxiety, yet you are drawn and held in this darkness and dryness because it is the only place in which you can find any kind of stability and peace. As you progress, you learn to rest in this arid quietitude, and the assurance of a comforting and mighty presence at the heart of the experience grows on you more and more, until you gradually realise that it is (God revealing Himself) to you in a light that is painful to your nature and to all its faculties, because it is infinitely above them and because its purity is at war with your own selfishness and darkness and imperfection."

Any one well acquainted with the hundred stanzas of the *Thiruchchathakam* will realise how true is the content of those stanzas to the state of contemplation described by Merton. I shall pick out at random five stanzas from this decad and reproduce them to show the truth of what I mean. Maanikkavaachakar sings in the beginning, the middle and the end, in fact throughout this decad, in terms of "a certain interior suffering and anxiety".

I do not call upon You with great potent love,
 By crying : " Obeisance to You ",
 Or by rolling (on the ground),
 Or by standing or by praising You.
 My code of conduct
 Seems to be like that of the Lord of death
 Who, advancing against You
 Had to feel the sting of Your lotus feet !

5. 45

Here is another stanza :

Oh rare One to anybody !
 Oh Pervader of the ether !
 Oh great One on the stage (of my heart) !
 I do not shower fragrance-laden flowers
 On the dazzling anklet-girt feet which enslaved me ;
 I do not cry in amazement ;
 I do not melt in adoration.
 I cannot tarry (in this world).
 What is to become of me ?
 Perish I will, I will perish.

5-18

Yet another stanza :

I myself am a lie ! my heart is a lie !
 My love too is a lie !
 But if karma-tainted me would weep,
 I could gain You,
 Oh Honey ! Oh Ambrosia !
 Oh Essence of the sugarcane !
 Oh sweet great One, bestow on me, Your slave,
 Your grace that I may come unto You.

5-90

Yet one more :

There is no love in me to Your anklet-girt feet,
 Oh Partner of Her with cardamom scented tresses !
 By the miracle of turning a stone into a soft fruit,
 You made me a devotee to Your anklet-girt feet ;
 Your grace has no limits ;
 By whatever means whatever I may do,
 Yet capable indeed You are
 To show me Your anklet-girt feet,
 And redeem me,-
 Oh spotless heavenly One !

5-94

One last song shall I quote :

Unsuitable am I ; falsehood have I :
 Meaning by Your glance “ come unto Me ”,
 When You invitingly looked at me,
 Pains I did not take ; wiles I have :
 Die I did not,
 Oh You with blossoming lotus like feet !
 Oh You with rosy body !
 You and those devotees who have received Your grace
 Having departed thither,
 You detained me here.
 Is this just, Oh my Lord, and Lord of us all ?
 To the karma of wilful me is there no end ?

5-93

“ Desert of aridity”, “ interior suffering and anxiety”, “ a light that is painful to one’s nature and to all its faculties, because its purity is at war with one’s own selfishness, and imperfection”. These were terms in the passage from Merton’s *Seeds of Contempla-*

tion. All these aspects of experience are only too clearly evident in the stanzas I have just now quoted from the *Tiruchchathakam*. If there are any doubts about Maanickkavaachakar's sense of frustration, despondency and distraught condition of mind at this stage of his spiritual journey, they will be dispelled when we examine the 50 poems in the next decad which bears the title of *Neeththal Vinnappam*.

The *Neeththal Vinnappam*, i. e., the 'Forsake Me Not Plaint', is a heart-rending entreaty in 50 stanzas. Each stanza has the same refrain — "forsake me not". The last three stanzas of this decad will be enough to show Maanikkavaachakar's sense of frustration and despair at this stage of his spiritual life.

He sings thus:

Oh mighty One who wears a string of skulls
 Like a garland of stars,
 And sports in the hands the fire and the snakes !
 Forsake me not.
 If You do, when the exalted ones ask me :
 "Whose henchman are you ? ",
 I shall hold You up to derisive laughter
 By replying :
 "I am the honourable servant
 Of the servants of the King of Uththarakosamangai ! "
 6-48

He continues :

I shall hold You up to derisive laughter,
 And shall say at length

That this contemptible life and service of mine
Are dedicated to (You,) Easan !

Forsake me not.

If You do, I shall traduce You by calling You
The Madman donning the pelt of the raging elephant,
The Lunatic with the skin (of the tiger),
The Crank who feeds on poison,
The Crazy one with the fire
From the hamlet's cremation ground,
And (to crown all) the Nitwit
Who has even me as his bondsman !

6-49

He concludes thus :

Whether I traduce You or praise You,

Do not forsake me,

Who languishes here repenting for his sins.

Oh You resplendent like a red coral hill !

Oh You Who have sway over me !

Oh You Whose right it is to feed on ambrosia,

But Who ate the raging poison

Out of compassion for the lowly creatures !

6-50

On account of this sense of frustration and despair which is common to the fifth and sixth decads, I consider them as forming a unified part which describes that part of the life of Maanikkavaachakar in which he went through an attempt to apprehend the Godhead (through the intellect.)

Arivu – intellect – and *unarvu* – intuition – are very different things. The *Katha Upanishad* has this verse :

“ The wise man should merge speech in mind, the latter he should merge in the intellect ; the intellect

he should merge in the great Self. That he should merge in Shaantaatman, the tranquil Self."

"The soul", explains Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, "must go beyond all images in the mind, all workings of the intellect, and, by the process of abstraction, the soul is rapt above itself and flows into God in Whom are peace and fulness."

This can be achieved only by the third mode of contemplation described by Thomas Merton. Fr. Johnston calls this the third kind of wisdom. Merton says of his third mode of contemplation :

"Then there is a *quietud subrosa*, a tranquility full of savour and rest and unction in which, although there is nothing to feed and satisfy the senses or the imagination or the intellect, the will rests in a deep, luminous and absorbing experience of love."

Fr. Johnston says :

"The third kind of wisdom is mystical: this is experimental knowledge of God as He is in Himself. The apophatic* mystics speak of it as silent, supraconceptual, dark, infused by God Himself. This is the highest wisdom man can attain to in this life; in comparison with it (in the words of the author of *The Cloud*) natural knowledge is "but feigned folly formed in fantasy, as far from the very certainty when the ghostly sun shineth, as the

* 'Apophatic mystics' - so called because of their tendency to emphasise that God is best known by negation; we can know much more about what God is not than about what He is.

darkness of the moonshine in a mist at midwinter's night from the brightness of the sunbeam in the clearest time of midsummer day". Mystics will often say that by comparison with what they have seen in prayer, scientific knowledge and theology are like 'ignorance'."

But this does not mean the rejection of the first two modes of contemplation, or wisdom as Fr. Johnston will call them, in favour of the third. The traditional position is, in the words of Fr. Johnston, that

"there is only one truth, known imperfectly by reason, more clearly by faith, more clearly still by mystical experience, and perfectly in the beatific vision. / Faith does not contradict reason, but builds on it; mystical knowledge does not contradict reason or revelation but builds on them. / Far from being a rejection of dogma, it is a supraconceptual penetration of those mysteries that are formulated conceptually (and, for that reason, imperfectly) in dogma."

THE ILLUMINATIVE WAY

The third of the hypothetical parts, into which, I think, *The Thiruvaachakam* can be divided, relates in soulful language the deep luminous and absorbing experience of love which was the great privilege of Maanikkavaachakar to have in his life.

If, even in the 90th stanza of *The Thiruchchatakam* he sings :

I myself am a lie ; my heart is a lie ;
My love too is a lie ;

But if karma-tainted me would weep,
I could gain you.

Oh Honey! Oh Ambrosia!

Oh Essence of the sugarcane!

Oh sweet great One! Bestow on me, Your slave,
Your grace, that I may come unto You.

and if, in the 93rd, he asks,

“To the karma of wilful me is there no end?”,
and if, even in the 100th, the last stanza of The
Thiruchchatakam he sings: “I should abandon all false-
hood”, surely, then the road he followed in the
Thiruchchatakam had not been of great benefit to him.
The royal road to God for Maanikkavaachakar was
certainly not the traditional one of austerities, penances,
mortification of the body, fasts and all the hundred
and one methods of self-castigation associated in the
popular mind with *thavam*, a life of contemplation.
For Maanikkavaachakar sings that God hid Himself
completely from the vision of even those “who, discard-
ing far behind their senses five, went to inaccessible,
mountains, and, with the body stripped of all but the
bare breath, performed rare austerities”. . Elsewhere,
describing (the grace gratuitously) shown to him,
Maanikkavaachakar sings:

Let us sing of the honey oozing,
ambrosial essence like,

Far-reaching, anklet-girt, **luminous feet** —

rare to be beheld by the *devaas* from heaven

Along with Vishnu, Brahmaa and Indra

even though they stayed in forests (engaged in austerities),

With body withering away and ant-hills growing over them —
which came of their own accord,
 And, showing signal love to this cur like a very mother,
 penetrated my flesh,
 And breathing life into its very hair-roots
 came to rest under the vaults (of my heart). 8-4

He returns to this theme again and again as if he would underscore the futility of seeking God with mortification of the body. In stanza 12 of decad 11 he says :

Let us acclaim our clear conviction,
 And sing, till it turns sweet in our mouths,
 Of the transcendent Effulgence
 Who, while, on that side,
 The throng of ascetics who were labouring for deliverance
 were sore wearied,
 graciously enslaved base me (on this side)
 And immersed me in the sea of devotion. 11-12

He recurs to this theme again in decad 23 in these words :

Overgrown with anthill and trees
 (While they stood or sat in contemplation),
 With water and air (only) for food,
 Dwellers in the (heavenly) spheres and others
 Have withered seeking You.
 Oh King, Whose blossom feet none of them have seen !
 You mesmerised me with one word* and caught me :
 For this act of grace, I do not tremble,

* one word = the mystic five-lettered word, na-ma-ci-vaa-ya.

My hard mind does not melt over much ;

Nevertheless, I do not die ;

I do not kill this undying body ;

I still keep roaming here,

Oh Civan who abides in Tirupperunthurai ! 23-2

(It is not strange that Maanikkavaachakar did not take to austerities, penances, fasts, mortification of the body.) It is not strange that he did not go away to the forests or that he did not follow any of the methods prescribed in Patanjali's Yoga-sutras. If one seriously thinks of the life of Thirugnaanasambandar, Appar and Sundarar, who along with Maanikkavaachakar are given the collective name of "The Four", it will strike one as a strange fact that none of them followed the Yoga-maargaa, the path of soul-searing austerities.) They followed the age old Tamil tradition, the path of love laid down in the *Tholkaappiyam*, *Irayanaar's Ahapporul* and *The Thirukkural*. (No language in the world except Tamil has a separate section of its grammar entirely devoted to the theme of love and its literature.) It was a fashion once upon a time to say that the section on love in *The Thirukkural* corresponds to the Kama-sutraas of Vatsaayana. But, now, none but the crassly ignorant would ever venture to make that libellous statement. No language except Tamil has so many literary works of great purity on the theme of love, love between a maid and a youth. : The greatest of these is the *Thirukkovaiaar*, a work of 400 poems, each poem dealing with one situation, or ' *thurai* ' as it is called in Tamil, in the love-play between a maid and a youth. Of this work, it has been sung thus :

'Behold the Vedaas' say, holy brahmins,
 'See root of the aagamaas', say Yogins,
 But lovers say: 'it is grammar of love',
 'Tis logic', say logicians anyhow,
 'Literature it is' say the pundit class,
 If one mentions Tirukkovai, the lovely lass.

It is no wonder, therefore, that Maanikkavaachakar, the author of the *Tirukkovaiyaar*, should seek to gain God through the path of love. (The *Naayaka-Naayaki bhaavam*, the concept of the lover and her beloved, the concept of a bride of the Lord is essentially a Tamil concept.) The third part in my hypothetical division of *The Thiruvaachakam*, comprising sixteen decads, from the 7th to the 22nd, from *Thiruvempaavai* to the *Koil Tiruppathikam* is the book of this love by which Maanikkavaachakar gains the illuminative knowledge of God which, according to him, was denied to many who tried diverse other methods. He sings: (in decad 3. lines 124 to 145)

While He shone (for me) with a golden light,
 Comprising the lightning-like flash
 Of a heap of emeralds and a cluster of rubies,*
 From Brahmaa and Vishnu who searched for Him,
 He hid himself;
 From those who toiled with mystic scrolls,
 He hid Himself;
 From those who, to the grief of their kinsmen,
 Sought Him (through penance) with single-minded devotion,
 He hid Himself;

* 'emeralds and rubies' = these refer to the composite form of Civan — part male part female — in which Paarvathi, (swarthy in colour), is like emeralds and Civan (flame-like in colour) is like rubies.

From those who, staking their faith
 In the power of the Vedic mantraas,
 Laboriously sought Him, He hid Himself;
 From those who boasted to see Him by some rare device,
 By the same device, there itself,
 Did He hide Himself;
 He looked on dispassionately (at sectarians) *
 And took them into His fold out of welling grace;
 Yet, He now appeared as a male,
 Anon changed to a neuter object,
 And presently as female with a shining forehead,
 And thus hid His true self from them.
 Bidding the five senses stay far behind,
 Seeking refuge in inaccessible hills,
 With bodies stripped of all but the bare breath,
 Ascetics in contemplation dwell on Him;
 From their vision He securely hid Himself:
 From those with the kind of knowledge
 Which vacillates between
 "God is, God is not" **
 He hid Himself.

* 'sectarians' — see lines 52, 53 of decad 4. As stated in the *Thirumandiram*, Civan, in His over-whelming grace, takes the worshippers of various gods as worshippers of Himself only. Nevertheless, in view of their erroneous beliefs, He hides Himself now in a female form (to followers of *Yaamalam* and *Vaamam* cult), in a male form (to those of the *Paasupatham* and *Paancharaathram* cult) and in a neuter form (to followers of the *Mruthi* cult who worship the sun, the moon, the Ganga etc.

** "God is, God is not" — such as the creed of Jains, "asti, naa asti".

And from those who said :

“ When of old we strove to find Him,

Even today when we strive,

He hides Himself :

That Thief we have found now !

Raise a hue and cry, raise a hue and cry !

With garlands woven of this morning's (fresh) blossoms,

Fetter His feet !

Surround Him ! Encircle Him ! Follow Him ! Don't leave Him !

Catch hold of Him ! ”

He, eluding their grasp, completely hid Himself.

(Lines 124 to 145 of decad 3)

How, then, could He be apprehended ?

By love, unswerving, unflagging, shameless, boundless, and selfless. “Love does not possess”, says Kahlil Gibran. It always gives. Love is the one device that God cannot escape, whose lure He cannot resist. He falls into the net of devout love.

In the spiritual world there is only one *Purushaa*, one male, the *Purushoththaman*. All others are females: engaged in adoration of the solitary Male, all eager to capture Him and enshrine Him, imprison Him, in their hearts. Therefore, Maanikkaavaachakar sings :

Your devotees, who, abandoning all activities

And casting off their bonds,

In freedom dwell

And everlastingly perceive You in themselves,

They all have come as maidens fair
 With beauteous dark eyes,
 And worship You,
 In the manner of human beings,
 Oh Bridegroom of the awe-inspiring goddess! 20-6

He sings further down in the same decad that for the same reason, Vishnu and Brahmaa said.

“ Our days in vain we spend here
 Without going down to earth
 And being born (as human beings),
 Seeing that life on earth is the means
 Whereby Civan chooses one for redemption. 20-10

In the 20th Century, Robert Frost underscores the same thought when he sings :

“Earth is the right place for love :
 I don't know where it is likely to go better. ” *

For human beings, then, the way of worship is love, the consecration of oneself as the Lord's bride — the *Naayaka-Naayaki bhaavam*.

Maanikkavaachakar, on his own behalf and on behalf of all of us, becomes the Lord's Bride, and in this third part of his great work, he dances step by step into the Lord's heart till both hearts beat as one, till, in fact, there is none but one. This love-play is the sublimation of carnal love into spiritual love. Aldous Huxley quotes St. Bernard as saying :

“ For my part, I think the chief reason which prompted the invisible God to become visible in the

* Birches.

flesh, and to hold converse with men was to lead carnal men, who are only able to love carnally, to the healthful love of His flesh, and afterwards, little by little, to spiritual love."

True to the scarcely admitted but very real characteristic of courtship, it is the maiden who sets her heart on a man, and woos him till he is irrevocably hers. Maanikkavaachakar conforms to this tradition but with (a unique difference) The seeker after the One Reality is a very lovesick maiden indeed, but with one great difference from her other earthly sisters. Her passion, it is true, sears her like a flame, but, in the process, it burns away all the dross of carnal and earthly love. When the chase is over and victory is hers, it is she who, as a supplicant, assures her Beloved thus :

"What service You demand, that we shall offer."

True love always humbles itself in victory, for (love is service.) When love humbles itself, all desire dies. When desire dies, passion becomes passionless. Kothai Naachiyaar, in a similar context, sings :

For ever, for seven and seven births,
With You united shall we be ;
To You alone shall we be servitors ;
All our other passions do You transform.

In this love-play, Maanikkavaachakar becomes a girl who has not yet entered her teens. She was scarcely twelve. Maanikkavaachakar becomes a girl in the setting of a traditional game of young girls in the month of *Maarghazhi* or, according to the ancient almanacs, the month of *Thai*. Little girls used to accompany their

mothers to the river for a bath in the very early hours of the morning. The girls will call at one another's houses, and will go through the streets to the river chanting the names of the Lord and singing songs of His glory. The mothers will bathe the children before they take their bath. While the mothers are bathing, the children will make an image of *Paavai* out of the sands of the river and play at worshipping it, praying to be blessed with an eligible husband.

It is in this setting that the *Thiruvempaavai*, the 7th decad begins.

A little girl who has not yet entered her teens is sleeping in her house. It is very very early in the morning. But it was time to get up and join her companions who would soon be coming down the street chanting the thousand and one names of God on their way to the river for the *Maargazhi Neeraadal*, the ritualistic traditional bath on all the days of the month of *Maargazhi*. But our girl is fast asleep, perhaps dreaming herself to be in the arms of her beloved. For, does not Thiruvalluvar sing :

While I am asleep, he becomes a lover in my arms, but, when
I wake up, he hurriedly becomes a dweller in my heart. (1218)

She is in love ; her lover is Maadevan, no other than Lord Civan Himself. She had not confided the secret of her love in any one. But her companions could have easily divined it, if they were not too young to understand such a passion as their companion's, too much engrossed in the *paavai nonmbu*, too ready to dub her as a lazy sleepyhead. Many signs they had, but they

did not see. They themselves mention those signs. They taunt her thus :

“‘Passion to Paranjothi’, you would say, day and night, when we used to chat, and, moreover,

In the past, you used to rise from bed long before us
And come forward and repeat sweetly,

‘Oh my Lord ! Oh Bliss incarnate ! Oh Ambrosia !’

Till your mouth watered. ”

7-3

But it did not strike them, that she could be in love, and in love with God Himself of all persons on earth.

In the olden days of the joint-family system, it was the pastime of old women in the family to indulge in match-making, coupling the names of a little boy and a little girl and solemnly decreeing that they were made for one another. (And so it used to come to pass.) In the meantime, the two children would be the target for teasing by one and all the members of the family, so much so that, when even the name of the boy was mentioned in the hearing of the little girl, she would run away in bashful confusion and hide herself behind the door or a cupboard.

Our little girl in love with God Himself was no exception to this. The very mention of the name, or names in this case, of her beloved would send a thrill throughout her little body till she fell in an ecstatic swoon. This is called *aa randha paravasam*, becoming beside oneself with joy. It is in this state that the companions of our girl, whom I shall call, for the

nonce, Civakaami, find her and dub her a sleepyhead. They upbraid her in these words :

“ Even after hearing us sing
Of the unique great Effulgence
Without beginning or end,
Oh damsel with bright wide eyes,
Do you still sleep or are your ears hard of hearing ? ”
“ On hearing the sound of the paeon of praise
Of the anklet-girt feet of Maadevan
Come echoing down the street,
Sob after sob tearing her frame,
Her body in a trance,
This damsel has rolled off her flower-strewn bedstead,
And lies here helpless !
What, what is this condition, Oh my chum ? ” 7-1

It is quite clear that the companions of Civakaami first mistook her to be yet sleeping, but, on looking at her closely, they were not so sure of it, and were extremely puzzled and perturbed. Ultimately they asked Civakaami herself, “ What, what indeed is this condition of yours ? ”

The entire *Thiruvempaavai*, from beginning to end, deals with this divine love of Civakaami for Maadevan. Moreover, it is not to be taken as an isolated poem complete in itself. On the other hand, it is only the first chapter in the love story of Civakaami, and the tale is carried through the next fifteen decads till its culmination in the spiritual marriage of Civakaami — of Maanikkavachakar, the bride — with the Lord, the bridegroom. The sixteen decads beginning from the

7th, the *Thiruvempaavai*, and ending with the 22nd, the *Koil-thiruppathikam*, form one indivisible unit which deals with the triumph of love, a love more than human, in apprehending the Godhead, where all other means had failed and ended only in frustration.

It is usual to classify fourteen of these sixteen decads as having (a background of girlish games. Probably, it is for this reason that Navaneetha Krishna Bhaarithiyaar classifies them as forming one unit. *Thiruvempaavai*, it is true, was a traditional girls' game, in which they formed an image of '*Paavai*' out of the sand of the river — where they had gone with their mothers in the early morning—and played at worshipping it. This game has gone out of vogue now. The next decad, *Thiruvammaanai*, has, it is true, the background of a game played by little girls even at present. It is an indoor game, played with cowries or small pebbles, in teeth of the disapproval of the mothers, for the pebbles, when tossed up for a catch, would fall on the glass bangles worn on the wrists and smash them. But it is doubtful whether the rest of the decads really refer to games commonly played by girls. *Thirupporrchunnam*, i. e., pounding the scented powder for the bath of the bridegroom, and *Thirukkoththumbi*, a decad having as a theme the employment of the king of the bumble bees as a messenger of love, do not appear to be common games of little girls, but special devices, specially wrought for the occasion by Maanikkavaachakar himself. It is possible, however, that, in his days, there were such lyrical games to suit special occasions. *Thiruththellenam*, usually disposed of

by commentators and lexicographers as 'a game played by girls', cannot have been a common game among little girls at any time. For, if we take away the prefix of '*thiru*', what remains is '*thellenam*', and this should make sense. I believe that this is a compound word made up of two separate words, '*thel*' and '*enam*'. '*Thel*' means clear, lucid. *Enam*, the dictionary says, stands for bone, being firmly established, deer, the hide of the deer, and pain. It is clear that none of these meanings except the second one, i.e., 'being firmly established', fits the context. That is why I have translated *thellenam* as 'clear confirmation'. This decad expands in ten stanzas the assertion made in a single line (62 of decad 3), where Maanikkavaachakar sings: 'Behold Him Whom I felt certain was Civan indeed'. This game, if it is a game at all, must be of Maanikka-vaachakar's own coining. The next one, *Thiruchchaazhal*, may well be a game of the past, an argument in poetry between a scoffer and a believer. Each poem in this decad is composed of a derisive question and a silencing reply. Maanikkavaachakar uses this game, which, in my boyhood, I have heard played by girls in a school in front of my house, for his own purpose. The *Thiruppoovalli*, gathering of flowers for the worship of God, may well have been songs sung by girls while gathering flowers for God's worship. *Thiruvundhiyaar* too could well have been songs for a sort of a dance by girls, where they sang of the prowess of Civan. The next one, *Thiruththolnokkam*, it seems to me, cannot, by any stretch of imagination, be classed as a game played by little girls. Its maturity of thought makes

this improbable. Commentators and lexicographers have again dismissed this term as denoting a game of little girls. It is evident that it is a compound word made up of 'thiru' 'thol' and 'nokkam'. If we drop the word 'thiru', *tholnokkam* will mean looking at or staring at or gazing on the shoulders. Maanickkavaachakar himself uses this term in an earlier poem, the 60th of the *Thiruchchathakam*. He sings :

Enter shall I (into Your presence) ;

Mine alone are Your feet !

Standing in the midst of the devotees who adore You,

Laugh shall I, staring at Your long familiar shoulders,

Shameless cur as I am.

It is a tradition that an Indian girl does not look at any male, much less stare at any, except her father and brothers. She usually walks about with her eyes fixed on her toes. Staring at the shoulders of a male can only occur if he happens to be a lover, a lover of long standing, and that too in the privacy of their chamber. Kamban makes Seetha in *Mithilai-kaatchi-padalam* to sink her glances on the shoulders of Ramaa !

The pair of sharp lances called her glance

Sank deep in shoulders broad of handsome Ram.

Seetha is an exception just as, long before her, Maanikka-vaachakar, Civakaami of our *Thiruvempavaai*, was an exception. *Thiruththolnokkam*, then, is a situation or *thurai* in the love-play of Mannikkavaachakar and the Lord.

The next decad, *Thirupponnoosal* can well be a game of little girls, but *Annaippaththu*, *Kuyirrpauthu*, *Thiruththasaangam*, and *Thiru-p-palli-ezhuchchi*, cannot be girls' games. Of course, it goes without saying that the *Koil-mooththa-thiruppathikam* and the *Koil-thiruppathikam* could never have been games of little girls. It seems to me, therefore, that it does not seem to be correct to lump all the sixteen decads or even the fourteen decads ending with *Thiru-p-palli-ezhuchchi* as games of little girls. These are all special situations or *thurais* specially thought up by Maanikkavaachakar to give expression to his love, a love more than human, for the Lord of Perunthurai. Let us take one poem from each of these sixteen decads and trace the birth, growth and consummation of this passionless passion of the Lord's bride. These sixteen decads are capable of being divided into two sections, one comprising eleven decads from *Thiruvempaavai* to *Annai-p-paththu*, and the other comprising the remaining six decads from *Kuyirrpauthu* to the *Koil-thiruppathikam*. The first section is a moving first person account of the secret courtship, *kalaviyal*; the second is an account of the public declaration, the *karrpiyal* of *The Thirukkural*.

The heroine, the *thalaivi*, the bride-to-be, of the Lord, has not yet entered her teens. But she has already fallen in love with Maadevan. She has not confided in any one. Her companions come to her doors loudly singing the praises of Maadevan. She is in that state of ecstatic love when even the mention of her lover's name sends a thrill through every fibre of her body. As

soon as the strains of the song of the glory of Maadevan reaches her ears, she falls into a swoon.

She had, however, through sheer exuberance of love, on occasions, given away her secret. Her words are now used by her companions to torment her. She pretends absolute unconcern and would not accompany them to join in singing Maadevan's praises. She cannot trust herself to do so without altogether betraying her secret. But her friends are importunate. "You alone are fit to do so, do therefore in rapture melt and sing for us and all the world a song of thy Lord", beseeches one companion, while another entreats her to sing of Him "Who from time everlasting is the first of beings and the only One".

How Indeed Could One Praise Him ?

Willing yet unwilling, eager yet hesitant, she finds an excuse in His immeasurable greatness and turns on her companions with the impatient question, "How indeed could one praise Him ?" For,

Far beneath the nethermost of the seven nether regions
And ineffable are His blossom feet ;
His flower-laden crown is all knowledge's end ;
A Lady by Him is His form, but not the only one ;
Though the Vedaas, the heaven-dwellers
And all the world sing His praise,
Praises fall far short of Him, our unique Companion,
Dweller in His devotees.
Therefore, Oh ye of blameless lineage,
Handmaidens of Haran's shrine,

What is His city ? What His name ?

Who His kin ? Who are not ?

How sing we His praise ?

7-10

Nevertheless His Form Will I Sing

Her companions would not be put off. "Oh beauteous gazelle, sing His feet, the source of grace", they beseech her. And she sings. Over feature after feature of his face and form she dwells with loving reminiscence and sings to her heart's rejoicing.

The fragmentary moon adorning her Lord's head is the first feature which comes to her mind. Its cool brilliance is ever present before her eyes. It is one insignia which none else has a right to wear. It is His sole prerogative. How many times without number has she seen it on hill-tops and in the valleys as He went about His domain ! When He sped to her in the gloaming darkness to keep the tryst, as He wended His way down the hill through winding paths and even pathless ways, the crescent moon flashed in and out of the latticed foliage, now far, now near, but ever assuring her of His presence and speedy coming. If for a *brief moment* — for what seemed like eternity — this beacon of joy was hid from her eyes while perhaps He pushed His way through aisled courses of mountain streams, she could still always hear Him. He delighted in singing the enthralling sonorous songs of the *Saama Vedaa*. Even while she went about the day's chores under the stern eyes of her mother, her ears would keep eternal commune with Him.

Lost in the reverie of these delights of the eye and the ear, she forgot her fears, she forgot her companions, she forgot everything except her Beloved. With a secret joy suffusing her young face, with shining eyes searching the expanse of the hills before her for the flash of the crescent moon in the misty morning, with ears deaf to all sounds but the strains of His music, she lifts her voice and sings. Her companions and the world itself were silenced into amazed wonderment.

He with the crescent moon,
 The bard of the Vedaas,
 Lord of Perunthurai,
 He with the thread of (several) strands across his body,
 On stately steed He rides ; dusky is His throat,
 Red golden His form, ashes white thereon ;
 First in all worlds is He :
 Bliss unceasing —
 The traditional boon —
 To His veteran devotees He graciously gives.
 That all the world may amazed be,
 Let me beholding Him sing.

8-9

Two And Two Make One

She has irrevocably lost her heart to Him. "My love is to Paranjothi", she blurts out. She unceasingly thinks, dreams, speaks of Him alone. She loves to lisp His names, all of her own secret christening. *Aththan, Aanandan, Amudan*, she would roll these names round her tongue, tasting them like sweets till their honeyed sweetness melted and filled her mouth. But He was still a riddle to her. He seemed now this, now

that, always paradoxical pairs of opposites. Her heart was sore puzzled as He eluded her understanding. Now singing of Him feature by loved feature, her puzzlement increases till she can bear it no longer and must confide in her companions. Even as the words issue haltingly out of her sweet lips, the riddle is solved and her heavy clouded heart is illumined by divine understanding. Realisation of His catalytic quality comes to her in one inspired illumined flash. For when He enters (the heart) as the Lord of love, He,

Melts the very bones,
 Renders the two-fold deeds (karma) powerless ;
 Weeds out the rooted griefs,
 Purifies (sense of) dualities,
 So that all that has gone before perish entire.

40-3

So she exultingly sings,

For Him who is the Vedaas and sacrifices too,
 For him Who is the Real and unreal as well,
 For Him who is enlightenment
 And ignorance dark besides,
 For Him Who is sorrow and bliss too,
 For Him Who is the half, Who is the whole as well,
 For Him Who is bondage and liberation,
 For Him Who is the first and the last,
 For His bath pound we the golden powder.

9-20

His Infinite Condescending Grace

Immediately a sense of her utter unworthiness assails her. Simultaneously, wonder at her good fortune and gratitude to Him for His infinite grace overwhelms her. She realises only too well that her love cannot

stand comparison with Kannappan's immeasurable love. But with a wry humour she sees she too is beyond comparison, if only for her mite of a love. No one could have less. Forthwith her heart swells with joy and she sings :

Even after finding me lacking in love
 Equalling Kannnppan's,
 My Sire, by my own measure,
 Me too graciously accepted,
 And ceremoniously commanded me, "Come hither":
 To that flood of grace —
 Him with the ash-covered golden form —
 Go hum your song, Oh King Thumbi *

The Meeting

She had so long worshipped Him from afar. Just a glimpse of the flashing crescent moon; his sweet voice wafted on the wind; a blue patch on His throat, black against the golden skin; glimpses of these are her only acquaintance with Him. Even so, she had lost her heart to Him and had never thereafter even a fleeting glance for anyone else. All she had seen so far of Him were as good as not having seen Him. Now she is to meet him. She meets Him face to face. Just as Seetha, while she feigned to trim her bangles, stole a glance at Ramaa and shed her doubts, assured that he who stood before her was the same one whom she, from her balcony, had seen, and had lost her heart

* 'King Thumbi' ~ king of the bumble bees.

to, similarly our Lord's bride receives confirmation and sings :

The Lord abiding in beauty abounding Perunthurai,
 After He severed the root of my birth's seedling,
 On none else have I set my eyes.
 Formless (then), now a form He has ;
 Singing the beautiful city he graces,
 Let us proclaim our clear confirmation. 11-2

The references to Perunthurai and the city are to God Without and God Within ; Perunthurai being the worlds upon worlds and the city being the city of the heart. This will be clear from the succeeding two decads.

God Without

Aldous Huxley in his *Perennial Philosophy* says :

“ ‘ That art Thou ’ : ‘ Behold but one in all things ’
 God Within and God Without. There is a way to
 Reality in and through the soul, and there is a way to
 Reality in and through the world. Whether the goal
 can be reached by following either of the ways to
 the exclusion of the other is to be doubted. The
 third, best and hardest way is that which leads to the
 Divine Ground simultaneously in the perceiver and
 in that which is perceived. ”

Our Lord's Bride can but choose the “ best and
 hardest ” way and, therefore, she beholds God Without
 and God Within. With awe she looks at His vast domain

and beholds God Without — Him whom Maanikka-
vaachakar elsewhere hails thus :

“ Permeating all things, each one He cherishes, behold Him ! ”

Our Lord's bride proclaims this in song thus :

* What He smears is white ash ;
What He wears is an angry snake ;
What He speaks with His lips divine
Is the mystic word, it seems, my dear !
*What matters what He smears,
What He says, what He wears ?
The Lord of the universe, of all that has life,
The essence is He.*

12-1

God Within

“ Though God is everywhere present,” “ *says William Law (quoted by Aldous Huxley in his ‘Perennial Philosophy’)*, “ yet He is only present to thee in the deepest and most central part of the soul. The natural senses cannot possess God or unite thee to Him ; nay, the inward faculties of understanding, will and memory can only reach after God, but cannot be the place of His habitation in thee. But there is a root or depth of thee from where all these faculties come forth, as lines from a centre or as branches from the body of a tree. This depth is called the centre, the fund or the bottom of the soul. This depth is the unity, the eternity — I had almost said the infinity — of thy soul ; for it is so infinite that nothing can satisfy it or give it rest but the infinity of God.”

* The first four lines are spoken by a scoffer, the next four are spoken in reply by a devotee.

“ God Within and God Without ”, *Aldous Huxley goes on to explain*, “ these are two abstract notions which can be entertained by the understanding and expressed in words. But the fact to which these notions refer cannot be realised, and experienced except in ‘ the deepest and the most central part of the soul ’. And this is true no less of God Without than of God Within. ”

Accordingly, the Lord’s bride proceeds to realise no less God Within than God Without in the deepest and most central part of her soul. Hence her song :

(After) many a day praising Him and serving Him,
The great One, His blossom feet,
In my heart He planted ;
And as beauteous Flame,
Tearing the fibres of my stony heart,
He took me under His sway.
How His twin feet turned into gold,
Let us sing and gather flowers for Him. 13-9

(His Prowess

Realising God Within in the deepest and most central part of her soul, she sings of His great prowess :

Two arrows we saw not in Ekambar’s hand !
One arrow — three cities (fell) — bounce for joy !
And one also was too many ! Bounce for joy ! * 14-2

This refers to the destruction of *thiri - puram*, the three cities symbolising the three *malams*, (accretions) — *aanavam*, *maayai*, *Kanmam* — which taint the soul. The Lord did not even use the arrow which He fixed to His bow. In His grace, He just laughed, and lo ! the cities were forthwith destroyed.

Open Avowal.

Thus her passion progresses, grows, fills her being and can no longer be contained in secrecy. Posing as one moved by compassion, He has entered her heart and enslaved her, and has made her the target of public slander.

The point of no return has been crossed. Her plight overpowers her reticence and modesty and impels her to rush into the presence of her Beloved to shamelessly declare her passion, unmindful of the assemblage round Him. She rushes in dancing in ecstatic joy and longingly sinks her glance on His shoulders. So unbecoming of a modest demure maiden. Utterly shameless, senseless baring of her heart-locked secret. But she could not help it. Her love would not be contained any longer. She need not speak. Her immodest stare speaks volumes. Elsewhere, Maanikka-vaachakar sings :

Enter shall I, – mine alone are your sacred feet.
 Standing amidst saints that adore You,
 I shall laugh, staring at Your familiar shoulders,
 Immodest cur as I am.

Here the Lord's bride sings with utter abandon :

Pride we have lost, wisdom we have forgot,
 Oh goodly maidens !
 We think but of the anklet-girt far-reaching feet of Him,
 Lord of the South, Whom heaven adores.
 The rapturous Dancer's grace,
 If we, His slaves, obtain,
 Forthwith in rapture lost,
 We shall dance gazing on His shoulders !

Thus every true lover of God has to publicly proclaim his love so that his passion may be purified and transformed into passionless passion. Maanikka-vaachakar relates the experience of this transformation in the last poem of this decad thus :

Let us sing
Of the ineffable Inner Light,
The Most Mighty coming and entering my heart ;
Of (my) crossing (thereupon) the shoreless vast sea of desire ;
Of the headlong flight of the craving senses—vultures—
Robbed of their prey ;
Of the destruction of their eyrie (my mind) too ;
Let us sing and dance gazing on His shoulders. 15-14

Swing Ye Low, Swing Ye High

The point of no return has been crossed. A new fear assails her now. She sinks into despair. Will He accept her or spurn her and her love ? Her heart reassures her. 'Fear not, He will assuredly accept you', says the heart. What will be the sign ? He will sever the cycle of death and birth. Reassured, she and her heart swing in delirious joy and sing :

Poison – sedimented throat has He ;
Lord of the heavenly ones is He ;
From Uththarakosamangai's gem-like cloud-capped mansion
He will come with Her whose words are music,
And in His slave's heart take abode.
Elixir of deathlessness will well up in our hearts,
As He, in His grace, sunders the bonds of birth and death.
Let us His holy praises sing,
Oh ye who wear rows of bracelets white,
And swing in the golden swing.

Public Declaration

Their love has become the talk of the whole town. It cannot be very long before the mother of the Lord's bride comes to hear of it. Before this happens, she must be told, she must be confided in; her blessings, her invaluable wisdom, understanding and help should be secured. The Lord's bride, therefore, seeks her mother when she is alone. Tongue-tied, guilty, shame and shyness two shackles on her feet, she is driven forward by love and sheer necessity. As she nears her mother, she rushes forward and in a sudden close embrace buries her face in her mother's ample bosom, and, between muffled sobs, cries :

“ My eternal Bridegroom is He ;
Exceedingly beautiful is He ;
He is always in my thoughts,
Oh my mother ! ” she would say.
“ He Who abides in my thoughts
Is the Southerner,
The Father in Perunthurai, Bliss incarnate,
Oh my mother ! ” she would say.

17-4

Here ends the secret courtship.

Invitation

Though she only cried ‘ Mother ’ and could say nothing else, her mother, a person of perfect understanding, divined her daughter's secret and bade her send for Him. The Lord's bride rushes out in great

joy to entreat the *kuyil*, lovers' winged messenger, to call Him hither. She begs the *kuyil* :

Oh *kuyil* small that does frequent
 The grove with honey-sweet rich fruit,
 Do listen to this :
 The bounteous Lord Who, spurning the heavens,
 Entered this earth, and made men His own,
 The only One Who, disregarding the flesh,
 Entered my heart and my sentient life became,
 The Bridegroom of Her
 Who won Him with gentle eyes that excel the fawn's,
 Do bid Him come hither. 18-4

State Arrival

He comes, He comes in state, and she would proclaim His heraldry ; but in His presence she becomes tongue tied. But her mother and her kinsfolk should know His name and fame ; His kingdom, capital, river and range ; His steed and arms ; His war drum and favourite flower, and His banner. She therefore turns to her loquacious parrot to whom on many a lonesome wistful night she had repeated item by loved item His sweet name and proud fame, and begs the bird to announce Him.

She would not, however, have her mother and kinsfolk think that she had taught the parrot His name. " Speak His name ", she commands the bird, " recollecting what you have heard Brahmaa and Vishnu address Him ".

Parrot fair and young !

Recollect and tell the renowned sacred name

Of our King of Perunthurai ;
 "Aarooran, Cemperumaan" ;
 Or as you have heard Brahmaa and Vishnu say,
 "Our Lord, Overlord of the gods". 19-1

He is Arisen in Me

Aldous Huxley quotes the following extracts in his *Perennial Philosophy* :

Goodness* needeth not to enter the soul, for it is there already ;
 on'y it is unperceived.

The Theologica Germanica

"When the ten thousand things are viewed in their oneness,
 we return to the Origin and remain where we have always been."

—*Sen T'sen*

and proceeds to explain as follows :

"It is because we don't know who we are, because we are unaware that the Kingdom of Heaven is within us, that we behave in the ways that are so characteristically human. We are saved, we are liberated, enlightened by perceiving the hitherto unperceived good that is already within us, by returning to our eternal Ground and remaining where, without knowing it, we have always been".

Immediately on the advent of her Beloved, the Lord's bride experiences this same revelation which Aldous Huxley speaks of, and communicates it to her people. Him, Whom she could describe so far in vague phrases only, such as 'the flavour of the fruit', or 'ambrosia', or 'lo ! it is difficult to apprehend', or 'O, it is so simple', or 'even the immortals know not', she

* 'Goodness'—God.

could now with assurance affirm, "This is He, this His beautiful form". She has realised in herself the truth of the doctrine '*tat twam asi*', 'that art thou'. She has gained the unitive knowledge of the Divine Ground. Therefore he sings :

That It is the flavour of the fruit,
 That It is ambrosia,
 That It can rarely be known,
 Yet is so easy of access,
 Even the immortals know not.
 Oh Dweller in Uththarakosamangai's honey exuding groves,
 Oh King of Uththarakosamangai
 Who has assumed sway over us
 And has in Your grace come hither,
 That we may declare,
 'This is His sacred form, this is He',
 How would You like us to serve You?
 That we shall pay heed to ;
 Our Mighty Lord, arise in us.

20-7

Show Me a Sign

All saints, prophets, sages, enlightened ones, have all down the ages received a sign — a proof of the Lord arising in one's heart. Rev. Pope translates the subtitle of this decad as 'Eternal Reality'. For the sign is the seal of a covenant ; it is the dispeller of the dread of being forsaken. It is the conferment of eternal bliss. The Lord's bride too asks for such a sign.

The Mistress dwells in midmost of You ;
 Within the Mistress centred You dwell ;

Oh our Primal Lord, Whose being knows no end,
 Who dwells in the sacred golden hall,
 If in the core of Your servant both of You really dwell,
 Come forward and bestow on me, Your servant, the grace
 Amidst Your servants to abide,
 That my heart's purpose may be fulfilled. 21-1

This sign which Maanikkavaachakar asks for is very significant. In the first decad, the *Civapuraanam*, a poem of 95 lines, there is only one plea contained in less than one line, placed almost in the middle of that poem, in line 43. He beseeches the Lord to induct him into the Lord's *thozhumbu*, chosen band of servitors, devotees. (This plea is repeated elsewhere too.) In stanza 46 of the 5th decad, the *Thiruchchathakam*, he pleads "call me, and enlist me among Your devotees". His plea does not go in vain.) He is admitted into the galaxy of the Lord's devotees. This seems a miracle to him. He feels that it is true, but he had not dared to hope that his desire would be fulfilled. Therefore, in ten songs of wonderment he expresses his amazement at his good fortune and God's measureless grace. Thus in the 26th decad, called 'Decad of Wonderment', (*Adhicayappaththu*), all the stanzas end with the refrain, 'We saw the wonder of our Lord enslaving me and admitting me in His band of devotees'. Thus the 8th stanza runs:

The burgeoning flaming Effulgence

Firstly, banishing me that I may not stand in His presence,

And then making me enter a human body,

(Later) graciously looked at me

And with one subtle brief word,

Like ploughing in concentric circles
 Without aid of a yoke,
 He lifted me up,
 And cleansing me that all the past false life I led may cease,
 Made me (bliss incarnate), enslaved me,
 And inducted me into the fold of His devotees :
 This mystic event we beheld. * 26-8

Who are the servitors of the Lord ? What is their special merit that Maanikkavaachakar should make the admission to their circle the only plea in his *Thiruvaachakam* ? They are not any and every devotee. They are the servitors referred to in line 130 of decad 2 which run as follows :

“ The servitors, recipients of (the Lord’s) grace,
 Who accompanied (Him) that day ”

“ That day ” refers to the never-to-be-forgotten day on which the Lord came as a *guru* at Thirupperunthurai to assume lordship over Maanikkavaachakar. These servitors are the *Jeevan-mukthaas*, those who have already gained the feet of the Lord and have been freed from the cycle of births and deaths.

Sekkilaar, the great hagiographer of the saints of Tamilnaadu, thus records Lord Civan’s own words

* This is a difficult and abstruse stanza. The words “ Like ploughing ... without a yoke ” mean that God is capable of achieving His ends without requisite instruments ; compare with the words, “ Without seeds you will grow crops ” in stanza 96 of decad 5.

“ one subtle brief word ” = Om.

“ Made me ” — the words “ bliss incarnate ” are borrowed by the translator from the phrase ‘ *civam aakki* ’ in 1st stanza of decad 51.

addressed to Sundarar extolling the qualities of His Holy Galaxy of Servitors :

In their glory themselves they equal,
 By devotion they appropriate Me,
 By union with Me they conquer the world,
 Failings they have none any longer ;
 Established in unique state they are ;
 Through their love they enjoy bliss ;
 Duality they have transcended ;
 Do you go and join them.

(Stanza 196 of Thaduththaatkonda Puraanam)

Within this brief stanza, there lies the seed of an elaborate thesis on the Glory of the Holy Galaxy of Servitors of the Lord. Such a thesis we find in Sekkilaar's chronicle itself, in the prologue to the work. Thus Sekkilaar sings :

In the lovely temple where abides the Lord of the heavenly host —
 He Who took residence in the ant-hill, the Primordial Lord —
 In its effulgent beauteous court,
 Adjoining the portals of the surrounding ancient ramparts,
 Lies the holy chamber called ' DEVASIRIYAN ',
 Ceaselessly filled with Brahmaa, the flower seated one,
 Indra and Vishnu—in whose wide chest
 Resides She, the lotus-dweller—and other heavenly ones besides.
 It resembled several thousands of Seas of Milk,
 Filled as it was by the pure effulgence of the sacred white ash
 On the bodies of the sorrow-dispelling devotees,
 And by the resonance of the talisman—the Mystic Five Letters :
 It resembled the world entire,
 As the entire world was gathered therein,
 Deeming that those who worship the feet of Him,
 The Cause of all, are entitled to rule the world.

Chosen by the Father and publicly given the accolade of Servitude,
 Their bodies prickling and hearts palpitating with love,
 Bounden to do sacred service with their hands,
 These and countless others besides,

Men as pure inside as the ash
 Smeared on their spotless frames resplendent with gems ;
 By their effulgence they lit up every side,
 And shone with ineffable glory.

Even if the elements five their balance lose in chaos,
 Never forget they the blossom-feet of Him with the Lady as his twin,
 But stand steadfast by strength of far-famed path of love ;
 Great Rocks of blameless character.

Endowed with eternal riches which never wax or wane,
 Alms-bowl and red gold both with equanimity they view ;
 They shone with resolve which with welling love sought only to adore,
 And sought not deliverance at all.

Wooden beads their necklace, rags their robe,
 Their duty none other but God's service ;
 Full of compassionate love, they lacked nothing :
 How can I describe their resoluteness ?

Of mien and garb as fancy dictates,
 Unique servitors of the Dancing Lord
 Of age-long fame ; how shall I
 Here praise or sing their state ?

Sri C. K. Subrahmania Mudaliaar, the peerless devotee and commentator of Sekkilaar, has said thus : "Admission to the Galaxy of the Servitors (of the Lord) is stated in Caiva Siddhaantaa as the acme of Civa's Grace."

This is deliverance here and here-after.

Maanikkavaachakar's entire *Thiruvaachakam* is a plea for admission to this assembly. 'Initiate me in Your assembly of servitors', he pleads to his Lord. This entreaty is the axis of his *Civapuraanam* even as the Mystic Mantra 'Nama Civaaya' is the axis of the Yajur Vedaa.

Elsewhere in ‘*Thiruchchatakam*’ (verse 46) he sings :

“ Would He call unworthy me too to His fold of devotees ? ”

This is Maanikkavaachakar’s heart’s desire. This is his single plea in the whole of *Thiruvaachakam*. This is indeed *Thiruvaachakam*’s theme. This is what he gained, when he attained the *Jeewan – mukthaa* state.

Dying to Self

The consummation of passionless passion is the cousuming of the self.) This is the law to which saints all over the world and all down the ages have borne testimony, as the following extracts quoted by Aldous Huxley in his *Perennial Philosophy* will show.

The beloved is all in all ; the lover merely veils him ;
The beloved is all that lives, the lover a dead thing.

— *Jalal-ud-din Rumi*

My me is God, nor do I recognise any other me
except my God Himself.

— *St. Catherine of Genoa*

Our Lord’s bride ‘dies to her self singing thus :

This day out of grace to me,
You rise in my mind like a sun,
Dispelling the darkness therein.
On this—Your nature manifest—
I thought till all (volitional) thought ceased to be.
Oh Civan who dwells in Thirupperunthurai,
Whose ‘*None but Yourness*’ goes forth,
Goes forth into all things
As atom by infinitesimal atom till You alone are !

No indicatable particular thing You are ;
 You apart none are !
 Who can indeed know You ?

22-7

Thus Maanikkavaachakar loved and gained the Lord, and he has bequeathed to us his first-hand account of the One Reality which he was able to apprehend. Let us be worthy of this priceless heritage, and through his blessings become loving, pure in heart and poor in spirit so that we too may be possessed by this passionless passion and die to our self to become alive to the Kingdom of God within us, where, without knowing it, we have always been.

When the self has been consumed and God alone is, Maanikkavaachakar is able to sing exultingly :

You gave Yourself to me
 And took me in exchange ;
 Oh Sankara,
 Who, indeed, is the clever one of us two ?
 Infinite bliss I gained,
 What did You gain from me?

Oh Mighty Lord Who has taken my mind as Your shrine,
 Oh Civan Who abides in Tirupperunthurai,
 Oh my Father, Oh Lord of the Universe,
 My body you have taken as Your abode ;
 To this I have nothing to offer in return.

22-10

The “deep, luminous and absorbing experience of love” spoken of by Thomas Merton reaches its climax in the line,

“You gave Yourself to me and took me in exchange”..

The last stanza of the *Koil-thiruppathikam* which commences with this line, in fact, the entire *Koil-tiruppathikam* belongs not to the third type of contemplation of Merton, but to what he calls the 'next step', the next step which is not a step'.

Since I have built this interpretation of *The Thiruvaachakam* round Thomas Merton's definitions and description of various types and stages of contemplation, and since there is no other clearer exponent than him of the most sublime and ultimate experience of the contemplative, bar the beatific vision, I make no apology for quoting in *extenso* his summing up of the three types of contemplation and of his description of what is beyond them. Merton goes on to say :

“In all these three beginnings you remain aware of yourself as being on the threshold of something more or less indefinite. In the second, you are scarcely conscious of it at all; you only have a vague, unutterable sense that peace underlies the darkness and aridity in which you find yourself. You scarcely dare admit it to yourself, but, in spite of all your misgivings, you realise that you are going somewhere and that your journey is guided and that you can feel safe.

“In the third, you are in the presence of a more definite and more personal Love, Who invades your mind and will in a way you cannot grasp, eluding every attempt on your part to contain and hold Him by any movement of your own soul. You:

know that this "Presence" is God. But for the rest He is hidden in a cloud, although He is so near as to be inside you and outside you and all round you.

"When this contact with God deepens and becomes more pure, the cloud thins. In proportion as the cloud gets less opaque, the experience of God opens out inside you as (a terrific emptiness). What you experience is the emptiness and purity of your own faculties, produced in you by a created effect of God's love. Nevertheless, since it is God Himself Who directly produces this effect and makes Himself known by it, without any other intermediary, the experience is more than purely subjective and does tell you something about God that you cannot know in any other way.

"These effects are intensified by the light of understanding, infused into your soul by the Spirit of God and raising it suddenly into an atmosphere of dark, breathless clarity in which God, though completely defeating and baffling all your natural understanding, becomes somehow obvious.

"However, in all these things you remain very far from God, much farther than you realise. And there are always two of you. There is yourself and there is God making himself known to you by these effects.

"BUT as long as there is this sense of separation, this awareness of distance and difference between ourselves and God, we have not yet entered into the fulness of contemplation.

“As long as we only stand on the threshold of the abyss of purity and emptiness that is God, we are still infinitely far from God, and the grace still teach us little of Him.

“From our side of the threshold/ (this darkness) this emptiness, look deep and vast — and exciting. There is nothing, we can do about entering in. We cannot force our way over the edge, although there is no barrier.

“But the reason is perhaps that there is also/ no abyss.

“There you remain, somehow feeling that the next step will be a plunge and you will find yourself flying in interstellar space.

“When the next step comes, you do not take the step, you do not know the transition, you do not fall into anything. You do not go anywhere, and so you do not know the way by which you got there or the way by which you come back afterwards. You are certainly not lost. You do not fly. There is no space or there is all space; it makes no difference.

“The next step is not a step.

“What happens is that the separate entity that is you apparently disappears and nothing seems to be left but a pure freedom indistinguishable from infinite Freedom, love identified with Love. Not two loves, one waiting for the other, striving for the other, but Love Loving in Freedom.

“Would you call this experience? I think you might say that this only becomes an experience in a man’s memory. Otherwise it seems wrong to even speak of it as something that happens. Because things that happen have to happen to some subject, and experiences have to be experienced by someone. But here the subject of any divided or limited or creature experience seems to have vanished. (You are not you, you are fruition.) If you like, you do not have an experience, you become Experience; but that is entirely different, because you no longer exist in such a way that you can reflect on yourself or see yourself having an experience, or judge what is going on, if it can be said that something is going on that is not eternal and unchanging and an activity so tremendous that it is infinitely still.

“And here all adjectives fall to pieces. Words are stupid. Everything you say is misleading, unless you list every possible experience and say: ‘This is not what it is. This is not what I am talking about’.

“Metaphor has now become hopeless altogether. Talk about “darkness” if you must; but the thought of darkness is already too dense and too coarse. You can speak of “emptiness” but that makes you think of floating round in space; and this is nothing spatial.

“What it is, is freedom. It is perfect love. It is pure renunciation. It is the fruition of God.

“It is not freedom ushering in some subject ; it is not love as an action dominated by an impulse germane to one’s own being ; it is not renunciation that plans and executes itself after the manner of a virtue.

“It is freedom living and circulating in God Who is Freedom. It is love loving in Love. It is the purity of God rejoicing in His own liberty.

“And here, when contemplation becomes what it is really meant to be, it is no longer something poured out of God into a created subject, so much as God living in God, and identifying a created life with His own life so that there is nothing left of any experimental significance but God living in God.”

I would not have reproduced such a long quotation if it were not utterly germane to my subject and if I did not feel that I could not give expression in my own words to that which Thomas Merton speaks of with such lucidity out of his(own personal experience.)

Let us cull some key words and phrases from the above quotation.

“The next step is not a step”

“What happens is that the separate entity that is you apparently disappears and nothing seems to be left/but a pure freedom indistinguishable from infinite freedom”

“What it is, is freedom, It is perfect love. It is pure renunciation.”

“IT IS THE FRUITION OF GOD.”

“Contemplation is no longer something poured out of God into a created subject, so much as God living in God, and identifying a created life with His own life so that there is nothing left of any experimental significance but God living in God.”

It will be clear that Maanikkavaachakar relates exactly such an experience when he sings :

You gave Yourself to me, and took me in exchange,

... ..

Oh Mighty Lord Who has taken my mind as Your shrine,

My body You have taken as Your abode.

In fact, the entire *Koil-thiruppathikam* is the relation of exactly such an experience of the ‘fruition of God’ in sweet Tamil songs of great melody and greater depth of significance.

This is the *Jeewan-mukthaa* state, the state in which, according to Maanikkavaachakar himself, saints, abandoning all activities and casting off their bonds, in freedom dwell, and everlastingly perceive the Lord in themselves. My hypothetical third part of *The Thiruvaachakam*, ends with Maanikkavaachakar attaining this state, which, in the words of Merton, is God living in God. This is the mystical union, in which, Merton says, “God and man, while remaining no doubt metaphysically distinct, are practically and experimentally ‘one spirit’”. This is the *nirvikalpa samaadhi*.

In that moment when the Lord, in condescending grace, delivers Himself to the mystic, he is filled with God—he is God.

That rare moment is for ever captured in the outburst of rapture with which Maanikkavaachakar concludes the *Thiru-anda-p-pahuthi*, the 3rd decad. He sings :

I know not what to say.

Blessed be You. Is this proper ?

Ah me, a mere cur, I cannot sustain this :

What You to me have done, I cannot comprehend.

Ah, I am dead. To me, Your slave,

What You in Your grace have given, I know not ;

With mere sipping, I am not content ;

(Greedily) swallowing, I cannot take it in.

Like the waves of the rich cool sea of milk,

And like the waters in mid-ocean

On full moon day,

Ambrosia sweet, begging all description,

He ordained to collect

In each hair-root of my body.

Within this cur's frame,

Through every fibre of this wretch's fleshy body,

Injecting sweet honey with the aid of a *kurambu*

He pumped streams of marvellous ambrosia.

And as if with my melting heart he fashioned a new form,

An ecstasy-bubbling body he created for me.

Ultimately, He made me be even like the complacent elephant

Which had fed on choice sugar-cane and wood-apples.

Thus, when in me Mercy's pure honey he mixed,

In His grace, He made even me, surpassing ambrosia sweet —

He of a nature which neither Brahmaa nor Vishnu know.

(Lines 163-182)

THE UNITIVE WAY

The object of the contemplative has been achieved. The apprehension of the Godhead has been achieved. The present birth in human form has served its purpose. It is a mistaken notion that the Hindu ascetic curses his body and fulminates against it. The *Thirumandhiram* tells him that the human body is the temple of God and exhorts him to treat it with respect. Manaikkavaachakar himself sings that even

Your devotees who, abandoning all activities,
And casting off their bonds,
In freedom dwell and everlastingly perceive You in themselves
They all have come as maidens with beauteous dark eyes
To worship You in the manner of human beings,
Oh Bridegroom of the awe-inspiring Goddess.

20-6

He also says that Brahmaa and Vishnu long to be born on this earth, for it is the earth alone where Civan's grace is wont to save. Birth in the human body is essential for release for ever from the cycle of births. The human body has to be well looked after till the objective is achieved.

A scaffolding is necessary when a building is being erected, but thereafter ? In the same manner, a body is indispensable till the *Jeevan-mukthaa* state has been attained, but thereafter ? Let Thiruvalluvar answer. He says :

Even the body is too much for those who are engaged in severing the chain of births ; why then other attachments ?

The body which was an asset so long has become a liability as soon as the *Jeewan-mukthaa* state has been

attained, as soon as the mystic union with God has been achieved. Liable as it is to disease and decay, to pain and putrefaction, the *Jeevan-mukthaa* now longs for release from the body, longs for death./ He has obtained, it is true, supreme bliss, but still evanescent bliss; he has obtained union with God, but still not (eternal union.) The mystic lives with a dread as a companion, the dread of losing the bliss, the ecstatic union with God. For, as Thomas Merton says: “there is no infallible way of guaranteeing the mystic against every mistake; he can never be perfectly sure of any human technique”. So the *Jeevan-mukthaa* now longs for death, for release from the human body, for eternal bliss and union everlasting.

So, the next decad, the first in my hypothetical fourth part of *The Thiruvaachakam*, is the *Ceththilaa-p-paththu*, the decad of “I am not yet dead”. Maanikka-vaachakar sings thus even in the first stanza of this decad :

Even after parting from Your new blossom-like twin feet,
Which, making my heart melt, had entered it,
I false and wily one, am not yet dead.

23-1

This longing is repeated in three more stanzas in the same decad. Thus in a second stanza :

Overgrown with anthill and trees
(While they sat or stood in deep contemplation),
With water and air (only) for food,
Dwellers in the (heavenly) spheres and others
Have withered seeking You ;
•Oh King Whose blossom feet none of them have seen !

You mesmerized me with one word and caught me.
 For this act of grace, I do not tremble ;
 My hard mind does not melt overmuch.
 Nevertheless, I do not die ;
 I do not kill this undying body ;
 I still keep roaming here,
 Oh Civan who abides in Thirüpperunthurai ! 23-2

In one more stanza, he entreats God to make him die,
 and in a further one, he pleads thus :

Oh my Beloved, showing me the grace,
 Which is never absent from You,
 And, Oh my Lord, showing me Your anklet-girt twin feet,
 Do graciously rid me of this delusive body. 23-5

In varying tempo, in varying phrases, this pleading
 goes on in ascending crescendo. Hear this heart-rending
 plea from the Decad of Desire.

To the end that this pus-exuding, fly-infested,
 Dirt-overlaid walking little dwelling (of my soul)
 May be destroyed, call me unto You, Oh my King !
 Oh Dancer, Oh Gem of a Guru,
 Whose role is to guard me,
 And assume lordship over me.
 Oh God ! Oh unobtainable One to the devaas ! Oh Civan !
 I long for You to look at my face a little and say :
 " Ha ! come hither ".

Take note of this, Oh beauteous great One. 25-3

His longing for eternal union with God now fills his
 mind to the exclusion of every other thought, and he
 sings thus in the Decad of Longing for Union.

When am I to be seated close by Him,
 Locked in an embrace with Him, **My uncut Gem** —
 The sparkling golden Hill,
 Unpierced Pearl,
 The Abode of grace,
 The delicious Ambrosia Who gave Himself to me,
 And Whom the dark Vishnu and Brahmaa,
 Being hindered (by their pride),
 Are unable to approach even today —
Who, pleased with my useless service,
 Assumed lordship over me, the straggling laggard ?
 27-1

In the next decad, the 'Decad of Refusal to Live Any Longer', he sings :

Oh Our transcendent One
 Who has pervaded the earth and the sky,
 Take note, other support than You I have none.
 Oh You who shine with resplendence !
 Oh King of Civapuram (my body) !
 Oh Civan Who abides in Thirupperunthurai !
 Whom shall I blame ? To whom shall I tell my woe,
 If You, Who assumed Lordship over me,
 Would not show me grace ?
 Take note that I cannot live
 In this wide sea-girt earth ;
 Show me the grace of bidding me come unto You. 28-1

In the next decad, the Decad of Plea for Grace he is again at his importunate pleadings. He sings :

Oh Effulgence ! Oh Flame !
 Oh Lamp of encompassing light !

Oh Half of the dame of curly tresses and buxom bosom !

Oh transcendent One !

Oh milk-white ash-smeared One !

Oh just One Whom Brahmaa of the lotus

And Vishnu do not know !

Oh Magnificent Beginning of all things

Who appeared under the *kurundha* tree

In Thirupperunthurai dear to me !

If this slave calls on You with ardour,

Won't You, in Your grace, tell me : " Don't fear " ?

29-1

Maanikkavaachakar's desire to shed this body, to die, has become an obsession with him. Out of the 11 decads which go to make the first sub-section of part four, the 23rd, the 27th, the 28th and the 29th, all are open pleas for death, the death that will confer immortality. Even the 24th decad, the *Adaikkala-p-paththu*, though a reminder to God by our saint that he is God's protege, is, nevertheless, only a veiled plea for death. The Decad of Wonderment, the *Adhicaya-p-paththu*, the 26th Decad, is only a reminder to God that the purpose for which the human body was given has been fulfilled and that death should no longer be postponed.

God in His abounding grace now bestows on Maanikkavaachakar the beatific vision. He vouchsafed the vision on two occasions, once in Thiru-k-kazhu-k-kundram, / and again in Thillai, the Chidambaram of our days. He exultingly sings thus of the beatific vision in the Decad of Thirukkazhukkundram :

Oh Perunthurai's mighty Lord of unvarying disposition !

Oh matchless Bliss to those who speak Your names !

On my attaining equanimity towards my karma —
Good or bad —

You came forward and, wiping away my on-coming sorrows,*
Showed me in Kazhukkundru Your countless holy forms
So that the never-desiccating seed of birth
May not sprout again.

30-1

What was the nature of Maanikkavaachakar's beatific vision? He describes it thus in the second decad

Were I to tell you the manner in which
The Chieftain of Mahendra hill
In the range where the Vedaas were revealed —
He of limitless magnificence, Lord of charity (towards all) —
Enslaved us,
On His holy form of power and indwelling beauty,
Lines of the sacred ash showed at intervals ;
The bliss which completely extirpates all foibles
Was the channel of His coming ;
The cosmic sound of the Onkhaaraa
From the great drum of the very great Lord of mercy
With the dame as one half of Him
Was resounding everywhere ;
He who enslaves one,
That one may not be tainted by the three *malams*,
Was holding in His hand the three-pronged spear ;
The spark-emitting Effulgence of pure hue
Who severs the original three *malams*,
Becoming my beloved,
Was wearing the garland of *Kazhuneer* flowers
To great advantage as most becoming Him :
What shall I say of the manner in which He —

* "on-coming sorrows" = Karma accruing in the present birth.

Whom Vishnu along with Brahmaa cannot assess —
Rode the steed ?

He, who graciously bestows

The path of no return (to the cycle of births)

Deemed *Paandinaadu* itself as His ancient domain :

He, who lifts to the loftiest of lofty states

Those servitors who are devoted to Him,

Had *Uththarakosamangai* as His capital city :

‘ Devadevan Who showers grace

On even primal deities ’

Was His holy name :

The bliss that drives away all ignorance was His steed :

The greatness of His condescendingly showing grace

To all creatures was His mountain throne.

(lines 100 to 124 of decad 2)

Another description will be found in the 19th decad which has the apt sub-title of “Manner of Enslavement”.

Such was the nature of the beatific vision which was graciously vouchsafed to Maanikkavaachkar. The Lord always appeared to him as *ammai-appan*, the mother-father form, the form in which the right half was male and the left half was female, indivisibly united, a form of power and mercy. Maanikka-vaachakar calls this the ancient form. He sings thus in the 10th Decad :

Oh King Thumbi !

Go and, looking at that ancient form,

Hum softly (my message to Him)

With the skin (of the tiger) and soft silk as garment,

With the ring and the rolled palm leaf
 As ear ornaments,
 With milk-white ash and soft vermilion powder
 On the forehead,
 With the green parrot
 And the trident on the shoulders,
 And with armlets to match.

10-18

The vision vouchsafed at Thillai was in fulfilment of the promise held out on the occasion when Lord Civan, at the end of the *Guru*-disciple episode in Thirupperunthurai, bade Maanikkavaachakar stay back and come later to Thillai. Maanikkavaachakar refers to this in lines 127, 128 of decad 2 thus :

But He bade me, this cur,
 Come to His form-pervading hall
 In goodness-abounding Thillai,
 And, in His grace, abandoned me here.

Of this vision at Thillai he sings thus :

I, cur of a serf, saw in beauty-encompassed Thillai
 The sweet-tasting feet of Him
 Who abides in Thiruththuruththi—
 The feet of Him Who, entering me at a time
 When I had not even taken shape (in the womb),
 Established Himself in my mind,
 And, correcting my thoughts,
 Assumed lordship over me out of His grace.

31-3

On having these beatific visions, wisdom and peace descends on the mutinously impatient *Jeevan-mukthaa*, impatient for death, impatient to shed the human body.

He is in a very much chastened mood in the 32nd decad, the Decad of Prayer. He sings :

Would it be possible, by Your mercy,
 For even me—a sinner—to truly merge with longing
 In the ancient sea of transcendent Bliss
 Along with Your devotees who merge in it,
 And be severed from life, body, I and mine,
 With none of these excepted ? 32-5

Realising the futility of his wilfully and mutinously long-
ing for death in disregard of the divine will, Maanikka-
 vaachakar reaches the peak of his spiritual career
 in the 33rd decad, the *Kuzhaiththa-paththu*, where he
 surrenders totally and without reservations to the divine
 will. He gives up the last and the most difficult of all
desires to give up—the desire to reach the haven of the
feet of the Lord. Such renouncers are called *veedum-*
vendaa viralin vilanginaar. In four soul stirring songs,
 songs of the greatest merit in *The Thiruvaachakam*,
 Maanikkavaachakar testifies to the truth of the Kural
 with which Thiruvalluvar concludes the section on
 asceticism. Says Thiruvalluvar :

“If one would give up desire which is by nature insatiable, that-
 would gain one then and there the eternal state.”

Maanikkavaachakar therefore sings :

What is to be desired for, You know best ;
 It is You who grant entirely what is desired for ;
 To Brahmaa and Vishnu, who desire for You,
 You are rare to obtain ;
 Of Your own volition You assumed lordship over me ;
 Therefore, whatever at Your pleasure You graciously do,

The same I seek ; but should there remain in me
 Any trace of a trait of desiring something
 Of my own volition,
 Is not that too Your sweet will ?

33-6

He goes a step further and sings :

Oh Lord eternal like a hill,
 On that very day when You enslaved me,
 Did You not appropriate my soul,
 Body and belongings, everything indeed ?
 Oh Lord with eight shoulders and three eyes,
 Can anything stand in my way today ?
 Do You good, or do You ill,
 Have I mastery over this ?

33-7

One more step in the shedding of desires, and he sings :

Me a cur, the basest of curs,
 You took a fancy for,
 And of Your own accord enslaved me ;
 Other than leaving in Your hands
 This matter of delusive birth,
 Is it for me to research into it ?
 Is mine the authority here ?
 Thrust me into a body,
 Or set me under Your anklet-girt feet as You please,
 Oh Lord with an eye in the forehead !

33-8

He reaches the acme of renunciation of desire and sings :

Oh Lord with an eye in the forehead,
 I have to the delight of my eyes
 Beheld Your anklet-girt feet.

Henceforth, instead of contemplating on them
 Day and night,
 To the exclusion of all other thoughts,
 Shall I, Oh my Father, brood
 On shedding this body on earth,
 And entering the haven of Your feet ?
 Fine, indeed, is my serfdom to You !

33-9

Maanikkavaachakar shed in the last song the very last vestige of desire, and then and there attained the eternal state, the state in which the sense of I and mine has completely ceased to exist in his heart, and God has completely occupied him. In the words of Merton :

“ Here, when contemplation becomes what it is really meant to be, it is no longer something poured out of God into a created subject so much as God living in God, and identifying a created life with His own life so that there is nothing left of any experimental significance but God living in God.”

Here ends the first sub-section of the fourth part of my hypothetical division of *The Thiruvaachakam*. Maanikkavaachakar no longer looks back,/no longer wails and moans, no longer is at war with himself or with God. So far, Maanikkavaachakar did not have time for you and me. He was preoccupied solely with his own problems, his war with himself. Now he is filled with supreme peace, supreme bliss. His mission, his concern for the world at large, begins in the next decad, the 34th, the *Uyirunni-p-paththu*. He sings thus :

Oh you who are destitute of any hold !
 Oh you who are on the road to ruin !

If you would be free of attachments,
 And, taking hold of that Hold
 Which has to be taken hold of,
 Would reach the goal which spells good,
 Come rushing up and join those who,
 Learning of the glory of the Lord of Thirupperunthurai—
 He with the matted hair decked with honey-laden flowers—
 Cherish His anklet-girt feet (in their hearts). 34-5

Maanikkavaachakar has now shed all fear. It is true: that St. Thirunaavukkarasar sings: "We are not subjects of anyone, the Lord of death we do not fear", but Maanikkavaachakar's fearlessness has one fear left. Thiruvalluvar says:

"Not to fear that which ought to be feared is folly: To fear that which has to be feared is the characteristic of knowledgeable men."

So, Maanikkavaachakar sings in the 'Decad of Fear' of what he fears, of what you and I should fear. He sings:

The gory mighty lance I will not fear;
 The glance through the corner of the eye
 Of bangled women I will not fear;
 But if we see the loveless-ones
 Who do not adore my uncut Gem—
 Who dances on the stage of my heart—
 And drink in His grace,
 All the while gazing on Him,
 With all their bones melting away,
 Ah me! that is when we are frightened! 35-3:

All fear of being forsaken has been shed. Now, he can boldly invite us to share in the grace of God. And

he does so in the next decad, the 36th, the Decad of Thiruppaandi. He sings :

Well in advance of your time,
 Love God and be redeemed.
 He, Whom the one who swallowed the world
 Or Brahma or the heaven-dwellers
 Can neither conceive nor approach,
 He, Who 'swallowed the poison,
 Our Lord of Paandi,
 Is lavishing the contents of His principal treasury
 On His devotees ;
 Come and rush forward to receive it. 36-5

He can very well invite us, for he has made a captive of the Lord Himself.

He sings of this capture, this apprehension of the Real, in great exultation in the Decad of Apprehension of the Godhead, the 37th Decad.

Oh Flame of grace ! Oh mellowed Fruit !
 Oh King to rare contemplatives of great prowess !
 Oh Scriptures which have You as subject !
 Oh Experience past all praise !
 Oh Radiance of union !
 Oh Treasure that has entered the minds of devotees
 On their gaining clarity !
 Oh great Lord Civan !
 In the dark place I have caught You firmly ;
 Henceforth. where will You, at Your pleasure, go ? 37-4

This dark place, in which Maanikkavaachakar tells the Lord that he has caught hold of Him securely, needs

explaining. Not all my words can explain it as well as certain quotations from the *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Its unknown author says :

“Cease not, therefore, but labour on until you feel this hunger for God. The first time that you try, you will find only a darkness, as though it were a Cloud of Unknowing, which you do not understand, only that you feel in your will a naked intent unto God. Whatever you do, this darkness and this cloud is between you and your God, and keeps you back so that you may not see Him either by the reasoning of your intellect or feel Him in the affection of your heart. Therefore you will have no other course than to stay in this darkness in the best spirit that you can, always calling upon Him Whom you desire. For if ever you are to see Him and feel Him (to the degree that it is possible here) it must always be in this darkness. If you will continually struggle as I bid you, I trust that in His mercy you shall come to His love.

“Do not think, because I call it a darkness or a cloud, that it is any cloud congealed out of the clouds that fly in the air, or any darkness such as is in your house when the candle is out. Such a cloud and such a darkness one can create out of the imagination and carry before him on the lightest day of summer, and also in the darkest winter one can imagine a clear shining light. (Leave such false images alone.) I do not mean such ; for when I say darkness, I mean a lack of knowing, such as those things that you do not know or have forgotten are in the darkness. In

your present state you are not able to see with your spiritual eye. It is for this reason that it is not called a cloud of air, but a Cloud of Unknowing that is between you and your God."

In a book called '*Privy Counsel*', the same author, instructing his disciple to empty his mind of all thoughts and images so that it may remain in supraconceptual darkness, says :

"Let that darkness be thy mirror and thy mind wholly."

Fr. Johnston, explaining this sentence, says :

"The mind is a mirror; void of images and thoughts, but filled with faith; it is in darkness, and in the darkness one sees God".

He continues :

"This darkness which wholly fills the mind when, void of discursive reasoning and conceptual thinking, it is grounded in supernatural faith, this darkness is the cloud of unknowing. And out of this darkness of faith there arises 'the blind stirring of love', also called 'the naked intent of the will', that darts upward (or more correctly downward) towards God Who, by grace, is in secret and silence in that mysterious part of the soul that is called 'the sovereign point of the spirit'. "

When Maanikkavaachakar sings in line 89 of the first decad,

"Oh Lord who dances in the dense darkness "

and when he refers to the "dark place" in the Decad of Apprehension of the Godhead, he means this

darkness and not the darkness of ignorance or the darkness which envelopes the world on doomsday.

Maanikkavaachakar commences the last journey with great eagerness and elation. He sings thus in the 45th decad, the Decad of the Pilgrimage, pilgrimage to the feet of the Lord.

Oh you who have been called up
By the Flood of grace, our King,
Whose head is profusely decked with flowers—
The mighty Lord with the snakes for ornaments ;
The Flood of Grace which,
Unceasingly mingling with the heart of us paltry ones,
Dissolves it into Experience—

Oh you who have been so called up
And have lovingly become His slaves, come and gather together.
Behold ! The time has come to go—leaving the unreal—
And enter the haven of the feet of our Owner.

45-1

He does not go alone. He mobilises the army of devotees and wants them to advance on the heavenly city before the army of the powers of delusion takes it. In the Decad of Mobilisation of the Army, he calls together the army of devotees of the Lord thus :

Beat the cosmic-sound-emitting drum of our Chieftain
Who wields the sword of gnosis ;
Hold aloft the moon-like white umbrella
Of our Chieftain Who rides the most mighty bull ;
Don all of you the blessed armour of the sacred ash ;
Let us capture the heavenly city
Before the forces of delusion arrive.

46-1

Oh servitors of the Lord !
 Go forward as the vanguard ;
 Oh devotees ! march on the flanks ;
 Oh Yogins of resplendent prowess !
 March as the main mighty array ;
 Oh Siddhaas of granite might ! form the rear guard ;
 We shall rule over the land of the dwellers of the spheres,
 And prevent the army of sorrow from approaching it.

46-2

Thus far only can we normally follow any saint in his ascension to heaven. But not so in the case of Maanikkavaachakar. Probably, nowhere in the world's mystic literature has anyone except Maanikkavachakar ever given any account of what *videkamukthi*, life in God after death, will be like. This unique revelation is given in the 49th decad, the *Thiruppadaiaatchi*, the sub-heading to which is "the cessation of the travail of life". Duality ceases, Godhead alone remains. This vision of life after death was vouchsafed to Maanikkavaachakar, and he in his bounteous love for mankind, has left an account of it. He sings :

These two eyes shall no longer delight in the vision
 Of His anklet-girt feet ;
 My life shall not be degraded by association
 With the life of ensnaring women ;
 Even by oversight I shall not be reborn in this world ;
 Nor shall I any longer worship the twin feet
 Which Vishnu had never known ;
 Nor shall I indulge in song and dance
 Set to exhilarating tunes ;
 I shall no longer sing of the victories
 Of Him Who has Paandiyanaadu for His domain ;

No longer shall the mystic powers,
Which the heaven-dwellers delight in,
Exhibit themselves in me ;
None of these shall be when the Divine Fisherman,
Who of old cast the net, shall arise in me. 49-1

There remain the 50th and 51st decads to explain.
The 50th decad is a swan song, the last faint plea for
death. No longer rebellious, but with utter submission
to the divine will, Maanikkavaachakar sings thus :

When is this wretch to join You Who enslaved me,
Me, sans merit, sans disciplines,
Sans ardour, sans wisdom,
Me, who had been whirling round in a dance
Like that of the puppet-show doll made of skin,
And now lie here exhausted ?
When is this wretch to join You Who enslaved me
By showing me how to get God-intoxicated,
By showing me the way to reach You,
By showing me Your form that I may ascend the path
To the land from which there is no return. 50-3

The last decad of *The Thiruvaachakam*, the 51st,
the *Achchopathikam*, the Decad of Amazement, is a
decad of thanksgiving. It is an epilogue to *The
Thiruvaachakam*. All the songs end with the refrain :

“ Who else indeed could gain the privilege
Which my Father in His grace granted me ? ”

He sings :

Teaching the path of devotion to me,
 Who was laboriously striving
 In the company of cussed men
 Who did not know the way to liberation,
 Ridding my mind of the original taint
 That my ancient karma may cease to be,
 And transforming me into bliss,
 My Father assumed lordship over me.
 Who else indeed could gain such a privilege
 Which my Father in His grace vouchsafed me? 51-1

Thus ends *The Thiruvaachakam*, the great manual of mystic theology, the paean of rapturous songs, the greatest love-drama on earth, the story of the human bride and the divine bridegroom.

Tradition has it that Maanickkavaachakar was asked by some earnest enquirers the meaning of his monumental work. It is said that he took them along with him to the *sanctum sanctorum* of the temple at Thillai and, pointing to Lord Civan enshrined therein, dissolved into the Effulgence therein — the same Effulgence which he has addressed adoringly in scores of places in his work.

CORRECTIONS TO "PATHWAY TO GOD"

Page 189, after line 2 of stanza 61 of decad 5 add a new line :
Oh Hoary One of the heavens, obeisance to You!

Page 190, add after line 6 of stanza 64 of decad 5 thus :
Rid for me this body
and quickly grant me in Your grace
the high state, obeisance to You!

Add a note at the foot of page 190 thus :
*64. 'the high state' - release from birth.

Page 235, stanza 13 of decad 7, line 2,
at end of the line add: Which,
line 3, delete ;
after line 9 add a new line thus :
closely resembles our Lady and our King,

THE THIRUVAACHAKAM

(An Interpretative Translation)

THE GLORY OF THE THIRUVAACHAKAM

If the Vedic Utterances said to be words
 Of the three-eyed First-Cause
 With body shared by the resplendent bejewelled One,
 Or the vocal honey which emanated from the blossomy mouth
 Of the eminent One of Vaadavoor
 Praised from days of yore —
 If you ask which of these is the eminent one,
 We have not seen anyone stand by
 With eyes streaming with tears
 And mind thawing and thawing and melting
 While the Vedaas are chanted :
 But if *The Thiruvaachakam* is but once recited,
 The hearers become love-filled ones,
 With even granite-like mind melting and swelling up,
 With the eyes, surpassing the well in sandy soil
 Which, the moment it is dug overflows with water,
 Welling up and gushing with tears,
 With body, its hair standing on end,
 Quivering in every fibre.
 No one is exception to this
 In this world of men.

— *Thuraimangalam Civa-p-prakaasa Adigal*

1. CIVAPURAANAM

Beginningless Ancientry of Civan *

(Sung at Thirupperunthurai)

The Civapuraanam, besides being a prologue, is a definition of the Godhead, the Brahman; it is at the same time an autobiographical account of the author's personal apprehension of the Godhead, an account which relates with gratefulness and exultation the multifaced aspects of the author's relationship with the Godhead. Lines 2, 3, 6, 11, 13, 17, 21, 32 to 40, 50 to 61, 65, 69, 74, 78, 82, 83, 84 to 88, 89, 90 are relevant. The reader is requested to meditate on these passages.

There is only one supplication in the whole poem. It is contained in line 43.

The lines are numbered in this and the next three decads according to the original. As far as possible, attempt has been made to translate each line separately, but, sometimes, for the sake of clarity and continuity of thought, two or more lines have been translated together. In such cases, reference to those lines is given at the end of such a passage of translation. Ordinarily, every fifth line only is given a number. However, whenever there is a note to any particular line, that line is also numbered and is marked with an asterisk. The notes at the foot of the pages begin with reference to the number of the line concerned.

* 'Beginningless Ancientry of Civan' - This and other similar sub-titles to the various decads have been given by some unknown ancient commentator of great mystic and spiritual advancement. They give the quintessence of the decads.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

INVOCATION *

Hallowed be Namachchivaaya, (Your name) !
 Hallowed be the feet of Naadhan ! 1 *
 Hallowed be the feet of Him Who never departs
 from my heart even for as long as it takes to wink ! 2 *
 Hallowed be the feet of the precious gem of a Guru,

* The words ' INVOCATION ' and others, such as ' DECLARATION OF PURPOSE ' etc., are inserted by the translator to elucidate the structure of this decad.

1. i. The terms ' Namachchivaaya ' and ' Naadhan ' have been advisedly left untranslated in the translation. since they are proper names, ' Namachchivaaya ' is the personified form of the mystic five letters, Na ma ci va a ya. It stands as a name for the Godhead, the Brahman. Similarly, ' Naadhan ' is personification of Naadham, the cosmic sound, the Onkaaraa, i. e., OM, and is again a name for the Godhead.

1. ii. The feet referred to in this line and elsewhere in *The Thiruvaachakam* are not the anatomical organs of an anthropological God. In the words of St. Thirunaavukkarasar, the feet of the Lord are the knowledge gained by learning, the content of that knowledge, the resonant Vedaas of the brahmins, the sacrifices, heaven and earth, the effulgent light, the golden sun, the moon, the beginning and end of everything. Also refer to stanza 20 of decad. 7.

2. i. ' Him Who never departs from my heart ' - Whether man realises it or not, God ever resides in his heart as well during his dark period of ignorance as during his period of enlightenment. Later on, in stanza 37 of the 5th decad, our sage, addressing God, says : " it is not Your divine will to ever part from this cur by even the least part of (the length of) a millet seed." Aldous Huxley, in his *Perennial Philosophy*, says : " It is because we don't know who we are, because we are unaware that the Kingdom of God is within us, that we behave in the generally silly, the often insane, the sometimes criminal ways that are so characteristically human. We are saved, we are liberated and enlightened, by perceiving the hitherto unperceived good that is already within us, by returning to our eternal Ground, and remaining where,

Who in Kokazhi assumed lordship over me ! 3*

Hallowed be the feet of Him,

Who in the guise of the Aagamaas,

Stands close (to beings and pours grace on them) ! 4*

Hallowed be the feet of the One,

The Many, the Immanent ! 5

Let the feet of the King,

Who stilled the tumult (of my mind)

and assumed lordship over me, prevail

(over all my failings) ! 6*

Let the tinkling anklet-girt feet of Pinggakan

without knowing it, we have always been." The Mundaka Upanishad (II. 2-i & vi) says: "The self-luminous (Brahman) is seated in the cavity of the heart and is known as moving there ... Lives there within, in manifold ways, where the arteries of the body are brought together like the spokes in the centre of a wheel; within it (this Aatman moves about) becoming manifold. Do you meditate upon the Aatman as Om." The Chandhogya Upanishad (VIII. 1-i) says: "Now, here in this city of Brahman (*the human body*) is an abode, a small lotus flower; within it is a small space. What is within that should be sought, for that, assuredly, is what one should desire to understand."

2. ii. 'for even as long as it takes to wink' - this is the least unit of time according to *Tholkaappiyam*, the ancient Tamil grammar. It says: "The time taken for winking the eye, or the time for which the snapping of the fingers lasts, is a unit of sound, say the linguists."

3. 'Kokazhi' — Ko = the great; kazhi = port. Some commentators say that the reference is to Thiruvaavaduthurai, the seat of a Caiva monastery today.

4. 'Aagamaas' - scriptures parallel to the Vedaas dealing with pure gnosis. The Aagamaas extant today are not, in the opinion of the commentators, the ones referred to herein.

6. i. 'prevail' — gain victory. Please add 'over all my failings' after the word 'prevail' in lines 7, 8, 9, 10 as well.

Who cuts down (the tree of my (cycle of) births
prevail!

7*

Let the anklet-girt flower-like (soft) feet of Him,
Who is remote from those
who stay outside His pale, prevail!

Let the anklet-girt feet of Him

Who delights to stay in the hearts of those
who join their palms (in worship) prevail!

Let the anklet-girt feet of the magnificent One,
Who ennobles those who bow down their heads to Him,

prevail!

10*

Obeisance to Eesan's feet!

Obeisance to my Father's feet!

11*

Obeisance to the feet of the Effulgent One!

Obeisance to Civan's rosy feet!

Obeisance to the feet of Nimalan

Who is manifest (to me) in the role of 'the Known'! 13*

Obeisance to the feet of the King

6. ii: 'stilled the tumult (of my mind)' - St. Thirugnaanasambandar also sings:

"ollai aarri ullam ondri"

ollai = tumult, agitation; *aarri* = cooling, subsiding;

ullam = the mind; *ondri* = becoming one pointed.

7. 'Pingakan' - the Lord with a peculiar hair-do. It comprises the matted hair, the Ganges, the crescent moon and the snake hidden in the coils of the matted hair.

11. 'Eessa' - the Lord Who pervades all the universe.

13. 'the Known' - this term is one of the triad - *gnaanam*, *gnaathru* and *gneyam* (knowledge or gnosis, knower and the known), The known is the Brahman who is known by the knower i.e., the contemplative, and knowledge or gnosis is illumination.

Who severs delusion-bringing births !
 Obeisance to the feet of our Lord
 of grandeur-invested Perunthurai ! 15*
 Obeisance to the Mountain
 Which graciously confers unsatiating bliss ! 16*

DECLARATION OF PURPOSE

Since He, Civan, the supreme Bliss,
 abides in my mind, 17*
 by His grace, worshipping His feet,
 the Civapuraanam, to the delight of my mind,
 and the effacement of all my past karma,
 I shall relate. 20*

SELF-DISPARAGEMENT IN MODESTY & HUMILITY

On the One with an eye in His forehead
 beckoning me with His gracious glance,
 I, coming nigh,
 those beyond reach of thought notable feet worshipped.

15. Perunthurai — Aavadaiyaarkoil of modern times is identified by scholars and devotees as Perunthurai of old.

16. 'Mountain' — symbol of permanency. It stands for the eternal nature of the Godhead.

17. 'supreme Bliss' — Maanikkavaachakar refers here to the state which the 12th and last verse of the Maandookya Upanishad propounds. It reads: "The transcendental, unitary state of supreme bliss, devoid of phenomenal existence is the syllableless fourth (aspect) ; thus Om is verily the Aatman. / By self, he enters the Self, who knows thus." The word 'Civan' in our text is, therefore, to be translated as: 'supreme bliss' i.e., Om. Here is an echo of the thought of the second line of this decad.

20. 'Karma' — see Appendix III.

Oh Lord, Who, filling the sky,
 the earth and beyond,
 is enlightening Effulgence to me,
 Oh You Who are beyond assessment and without bounds,
 Your great glory to praise,
 not a single thing do I, of evil karma, know. 25*
 As grass, shrub, worm, tree, 26*
 as full many a kind of beast, bird, snake,
 as stone, man, goblin, demons, 28*
 as mighty giants, ascetics, devaas,
 in the prevalent world of mobiles and immobiles, 30

25. Place this line alongside of line 32 and meditate on them along with these verses (II. i to iii) of the Kena Upanishad :

Disciple (after reflecting further and realising Brahman) :

"I think I have understood Brahman.

"I do not think that I know it well ; nor do I think that I know it not. He among us knows It truly who knows this, viz., nor do I know that I know It not."

Preceptor : "To whomsoever It is not known, to him It is known ; to whomsoever It is known, he does not know. It is not understood by those who understand It ; It is understood by those who do not understand It."

26 to 32. compare these lines with the following passage from Jalal-ud-din Rumi, a 13th century Persian mystic.

"I died as mineral and became a plant,
 I died as plant and rose to animal,
 I died as animal and I was Man,
 Why should I fear? When was I less by dying?
 Yet once more I shall die as man, to soar
 With angels blest ; but even from angelhood
 I must pass on : all except God doth perish.
 When I have sacrificed my angel-soul,
 I shall become what no mind ever conceived.
 Oh, let me not exist ! for Non-existence
 Proclaims in organ tones, 'To Him we shall return'.

28. 'goblin, demons' — these are servitors of Civan.

Oh noble Lord, I have been born
 in every kind of birth, and am wearied !
 Oh Reality ! Your golden feet I saw this day
 and deliverance from birth gained !

32*

PREAMBLE TO SUPPLICATION

That I may be redeemed, Oh Truth, Oh Vimalaa,
 Oh Rider astride *Om*,
 Who stood established in my mind as Onkhaaraa,
 and Who, while the Vedaas wail, ' Oh Sire ! ',
 rises to the zenith,
 penetrates to the nadir
 and extends to all sides (of my heart)
 as the subtile One !

33-35

32. 'Reality' — as opposed to delusive births, (see also line 14). All the commentators except Navaneetha Krishna Bhaarithiyar take lines 26 to 31 as one unit, and exclude line 32 which they tag on to line 33 et seq. I prefer to link this line with lines 26 to 31 as it rounds off the sense of the previous six lines in a remarkably significant manner, besides agreeing, may I add, with the import of the passage quoted from Jalal-ud-din Rumi in the notes to lines 26 to 32. Furthermore, all the commentators construe 'meyye', the first word of line 32 as 'truly', 'in truth' or 'forsooth'. But when the 32nd line is taken as extension and conclusion of the idea in the foregoing lines, then, it has to be translated as 'Reality'. This is how I have been taught.

33-35. i. 'Oh Rider astride *Om*' — the phrase in the original, 'vidai-p-paahaa', means, literally, 'the bull's mahout'. 'Vidai' is, however, translated by me as 'Om' after the Taittiriya Upanishad's phrase (I. 4. i) *chandasaam rshabo*. Swami Shravaananda of the Ramakrishna Mutt, commenting on this word in an extensive and exhaustive note, observes as follows : "The epithet 'rshaba', according to the traditional advaitic interpretation, refers to 'Om', the symbol and designation of Brahman."

If we take this phrase to mean 'Rider on the bull', it strikes me that Civan is represented as riding on the bull in the sense that He is.

Oh fiery One, Oh cool One,
 Oh Master of Ceremonies in *yagnyaas*,
 Oh Vimalaa ! 36
 Oh Flame of the Real Who coming, in Your grace,
 that all unreality in me may dispelled be,

pasu-pathi, the bull being the *pasu*, *jeevaatma*, the soul, and Civan being the *paramaathma*, the Godhead. 'Vidai-p-paaha' will then mean 'pasu-pathi.'

33—35. ii. 'Onkhaaraa' — the mystic syllable 'Om.'

33—35. iii. I have inserted the phrase 'of the heart' in this passage as this must be the place in which this phenomenon happens. The word *nunniyane* (subtile one) can but mean this only. My interpretation is supported by the Chandhogya Upanishad verses (VIII. 1. i to iii) which read :

"Now, here in this city of Brahman (the human body) is an abode, a small lotus flower ; within it is a small space. What is within that should be sought, for that, assuredly, is what one should desire to understand.

"If they should say to him, with regard to this city of Brahman and the abode and the small lotus flower and the small space within that, what is there that should be sought for, or that, assuredly, one should desire to understand ?

"He would say : 'as far, verily as this (world) space extends, so far extends the space within the heart. Within it, indeed, are contained both heaven and earth, both fire and water, both sun and moon, lightning and the stars. Whatever there is of Him in this world and whatever is not, all that is contained within it.'

36. i. 'Oh fiery One, Oh cool One,' — the reference is to the masculine and feminine elements of the Godhead, to Civan and Sakthi, to Ammai-appan (Father-mother).

36. ii. 'Master of Ceremonies' — of the *aatma-yagnyaa*, the surrender of the soul, the dying to self by the devotee. See verses 6 to 9 of decad 33.

scintillates in me as gnosis of the Real ! 37, 38
 Oh blissful noble Lord, Oh Preeminent Wisdom,
 Who dispels the ignorance of me
 who has no knowledge of any kind whatsoever ; 39, 40
 Oh You Who are not created,
 and have no life-span or end,
 Who create, sustain, destroy and bestow grace, 41, 42

THE SUPPLICATION

Rid me (of this cycle of births)
 and induct me into the fold of Your devotees. 43*

LAUDATORY THANKSGIVING

Oh You (Who are in me) like fragrance (in flowers),
 Oh far One, Oh near One ! 44*

37 to 43. Students of the Upanishads will be delighted to note the correspondence between these lines and the Brahadaranyaka Upanishad's famous lines :

From the unreal lead me to the Real,
 from darkness lead me to Light,
 From death lead me to Immortality.

What is a prayer in the Upanishad appears here as the fulfilment thereof.

43. Commentators construe 'pokkuvaai', the first word in line 43, as 'send me down to earth to be born again'. But this does not seem to be in consonance either with the spirit of the supplication or with the 3rd line of the parallel passage quoted above from the Upanishads. For the significance of this supplication, please see the interpretation on pages 69 to 72.

44. i 'like fragrance in flowers', which is latent in buds and is diffusive in full-blown flowers, God is in ignorance bound souls and enlightened souls respectively In Tamil tradition, mystics and saints are said to diffuse divine fragrance.

44. ii. 'far One, near One'—compare with lines 8, 9, & 10.

Oh Content of the Vedaas

Who is beyond speech and the mind !

Oh our noble Lord Who,

like sweetness along with ghee

mixed (latently) in freshly drawn milk, 46*

preeminently stands, oozing honey,

in the thoughts of Your devotees, 47*

and severs the cycle of births

with the birth they have now taken !

Five colours You have ;

while the heaven-dwellers lauded You, 49*

You remained hidden from them ;

(on the other hand), Oh my Lord,

for the sake of me of potent karma, 50

whose real-self hiding delusive ignorance

is bound with the remarkable rope

of good and evil deeds,

46, 47. In translating these lines, I have preferred to render them in tune with the last lines of stanza 46 of decad 5 and St. Thirunavukkarasar's utterance (5-90-10) which is :

“Like fire in fuel and ghee in milk,

He is hidden, the great Gem of effulgence,

On churning, by planting the rod of kinship with Him,

And by throwing a few turns round the churn with the rope of feeling,

He will stand before us.

49. ‘Five colours’—the five elements—earth, water, fire, wind and ether—have been assigned in Hindu metaphysics golden, white, red, black and grey (smoky) colours respectively. As God is immanent in the five elements, their colours are ascribed to Him also. Another interpretation is that the colours refer to the respective colours of the five faces, viz., *Eesaanam*, *Tathpurusham*, *Agoram*, *Vaamadevam* and *Sadyojaatam*, ascribed to the Godhead when He is conceived as *Sadaacivam*. The colours in this case are crystalline (smoky), golden, black, red and white respectively.

and is wrapped all over with an external skin
 to hide the worm-infested grime,
 and which nine-outletted
 foul excreta-dripping dwelling,
 to its bewilderment, the five senses were seducing,— 55
 for the sake of such a me —
 who, Oh Immaculate One,
 due to a thwarting mind,
 was devoid of the grace of merging in You with love
 and of thawing and melting within my (stony) heart —
 You graciously came down on earth
 and showed Your far-famed feet 59*
 to me, Your slave, fallen lowlier than a cur, 60
 Oh Truth with tenderness surpassing a mother's !

PAEAN TO THE GODHEAD

Oh spotless Effulgence Who blossomed (in my heart)
 as a (multi-) petalled flame !
 Oh my Guru, honeyed Ambrosia, Lord of Civapuram! 63*
 Oh eminent One Who severs the hold of *paasam* 64*

59. This line refers to Civan coming as a *Guru* at Perunthurai to redeem Maanikkavaachakar and enslave him.

63. 'Civapuram' - the human body, the Brahmapuram of the Chandhogya Upanishad. See note to line 35.

64. '*paasam*' = the three *malams* i.e., the three taints of *aanavam*, *kanmam*, *maayai*, — ignorance, (the twin deeds of good and evil, and the matrix of all the five elements. *Paasam*, like *Pathi* (God) and *pasu* (the soul), is, according to Caiva Siddhaanthaa, eternal without beginning or end. It is a dogma of Caiva Siddhaanthaa that all souls, in their unembodied state, are tainted by these three *malams*, and that God, in His abounding grace, endows the soul with a body that it may be rid of these taints and merge in Him in eternal rest and bliss. See also lines 111 and 112 of 2nd decad.

and nurtures me !

Oh mighty River of abundant mercy,

Who, exercising amiable grace,

stands unmovingly in my heart

to the detriment of the wile therein !

65, 66

Unsatiating Ambrosia, measureless mighty One !

Oh Light Which lies latent in the hearts of those

who do not contemplate on You !

68*

Oh You Who melted me into water

and stood established in me verily as my dear life !

Oh You Who have not and yet have joy and sorrow ! 70*

Lover to those who love You !

Oh Effulgence Who becomes everything and nothing !

Oh dense Darkness !

Oh the One with the distinction of having no birth! 71-72*

68. See note (i) to line 2.

70. The Godhead has neither joy nor sorrow. But God grieves for His devotees and rejoices for them.

71, 72 i. 'everything and nothing' - Compare with last line of stanza 7 of decad 22 and stanza 8 of decad 37.

71, 72. ii. Rev. Fr. Johnston, the author of *The Mysticism of the Cloud of Unknowing*, writes as the first sentence of his book thus : " In East and West the language of the mystics is full of paradox. Concepts of "light" and "darkness", "vision" and "blindness", "all" and "nothing" keep recurring with a frequency that is sometimes bewildering. The author of the *Cloud*, then, is true to type in constantly playing on the paradoxical theme of "knowing" and "unknowing". Towards the end of the *Cloud*, he strikes the keynote of his message with an appeal to Dionysius : "And therefore St. Denis said : ' The most godly knowing of God is that which is known by unknowing. We know God, yet we do not know Him ; we know Him by unknowing ; we know Him in darkness ; we know Him by love' ".

71, 72. iii. God is never born ; He is called *Thaan-thondri*, *sui generis*. He is the cause of birth of all creatures.

Oh Beginning; Oh End; Oh Middle! Oh none of these! 73*

Oh my Father and noble Lord Who pulled me

(unto You)

and assumed lordship over me!

Oh rare-to-be-viewed Vision

in the conception of those

who intuit You with one pointed true gnosis!

Oh subtlest of subtle experience! 75, 76

Oh pure One without going or coming or mingling! 77*

Oh our safeguarding Watchman!

Oh ungazable blazing Light!

Oh Flood-stream of bliss! Oh my Father!

Oh much more than that!

Oh Clarity! Oh Quintessence of clarity,

Who, as the Light of a flame of stable aspect

and as ineffable subtle Experience,

coming in the form of diverse things

in this changing world,

becomes Gnosis! 80 to 82

Oh unsatiating spring of Ambrosia in my thoughts!

Oh my Liege-lord! 83

Oh You Who are capable of destroying

the dwelling of the wily senses, so that those (devotees),

who, saluting and praising You constantly,

and crying:

“We can no longer bear to remain in this carnal body,
subject to various vicissitudes, Oh Sire, Oh Hara!”

have, shedding unreality, become Reality,

may not come here (on earth) once again

and get entangled in karmic birth! 84 to 88

73. compare with stanza 20 of decad 7.

77. the transcendent nature of the Godhead is referred to here.

Oh Naadhan stepping a dance in the dense darkness ! 89*
 Oh Dancer in Thillai !

Oh Lord of Paandinaadu in the south ! 90*
 The indwellers in Civapuram (the body),
 who, saluting You, the ineffable One,
 as 'He Who severs the affliction of birth',
 repeat the aforesaid song
 with apprehension of its Subject,
 will go beneath the feet of Civan,
 while all those around them humbly adore them.

91 to 95*

Thiruchchitrambalam

89. i. Naadhan - see note to line 1.

89. ii. 'dense darkness' — see paragraphs commencing with the words, "This dark place" at end of page 94 and ending with the words, "point of the spirit", on page 96.

90. The translator ventures to think that the 'Thillai' referred to in this line is not the town in the South Arcot district of Tamilnaadu. On the other hand, he thinks that it is the place where the intellect merges according to the Kathaa Upanishad (verse III. 13) which reads :

"The wise should merge the speech in the mind and that (mind) in the intellect, the intellect in the Great Self and that (Great Self) in the Shaantaatman."

"The soul", explains Dr. Radhakrishnan, "must go beyond all images in the mind, all workings of the intellect, and, by the process of abstraction, the soul is wrapt above itself and flows into God in Whom are peace and fulness." "Purushaa" answers to the Shaantaatman," explains Dr. Radhakrishnan.

The translator considers that the word 'Thillai' is a compound of two syllables, 'dheehi' and 'laya' on the analogy of 'ellai', i.e., 'el' meaning light and 'laya' meaning extinction, the whole meaning of the word being 'the place where the light disappears' i.e., the horizon, which, to the primitive man, was the boundary. Similarly 'Thillai' means the place where the intellect (dheehi) merges (laya).

91 to 95. these lines are in the nature of a *pala-sruti*, pronouncement, on the fruits of chanting this poem with full grasp of its meaning and with apprehension of its subject, viz., the Godhead.

2. KEERTHTHI-TH-THIRUVAHAVAL

Chronological Praise of Civan's Holy Grace

(Sung at Thillai)

Keerththi-th-thiruvahaval is a composite word made up of *Keerthi* (Glory), *thiru* (sacred) *ahaval* (blank verse), i.e., Sacred Blank Verse on the Glory (of God).

Broadly speaking, this decad deals with the Godhead as it is cherished by men, giving it names and forms and places of abode. These places of abode are the temples for which Tamilnaadu is universally famous. This fame, however, rests merely on the architectural beauties and soaring heights of the temple towers, heights which are intended to be and are usually seen from miles around, from streets and lanes of the cities or towns where they are situated, from suburbs thereto, and from a ring of villages and hamlets in a circle of several miles diameter round the site of the temple. Very few people know, and fewer people think of the ground plans of the temples of Tamilnaadu. This is not left to the vagaries of an architect or patron king or rich man but is governed by rules laid down in the *Aagamaas*—scriptures parallel to the four *Vedaas*.

In the first decad, the *Civapuraanam*, we heard Maanikkavaachakar sing in the very second line :

“Hallowed be the feet of Him Who never departs
from my heart even for as long as it takes to wink”
Further down in this work, we will hear him sing :
“You took my body as Your abode”
and

“My mind itself You took as Your temple.”

He reiterates this thought again and again in many places. To Maanikkavaachakar, and indeed, to all the saints of Tamilnaadu, and, for that matter, even to the common man, the abode of God is his own body, his mind, his heart. Thirumoolar in his *Thirumandiram* calls the body the temple of God and instructs man to keep it pure and healthy.

This faith has been extended to the ground plan of the temples by the great sages who wrote the Aagamaas. The human body has, according to the seers and savants, seven centres, seven seats or seven stations, one of which is the normal habitat of a latent spiritual force conceived as a coiled serpent called the *Kundalini*, and which, with spiritual awakening, uncoils itself and rises, passing through the various stations, to the top-most station, the *sahasraaram*. These stations are called (1) *Moolaadhaaram*, (2) *Swaadishtaanam*, (3) *Manipoorakam*, (4) *Anaahatham*, (5) *Visuddhichakram*, (6) *Aagnyaachakram* and (7) *Sahasraaram* (the thousand petalled lotus). The sites of these seven correspond to the sites of the sacral plexus, the prostate gland, the navel, the heart, the larynx, the pituitary gland and the pineal gland respectively. The ground plan of a temple closely follows the ground plan of a human body with these seven sites. The diagram on the facing page will show the correspondence. The Tamilian, therefore, when he worships God externally in a temple, worships Him actually as enshrined in his own body. This external-internal worship of God is the theme of this decad.

There is usually a tank in the outer precincts of the temple, where the worshipper washes his feet, hands and face, and wears the sacred ash on his forehead, and other parts of his body—sixteen places altogether—in the prescribed manner. These places are the vertex, the forehead, the chest, the navel, the two knees, the two shoulders, the two elbows, the two wrists, the two sides of the thorax, back and nape of the neck. Such wearing of the sacred ash corresponds to donning an armour with its several pieces such as the helmet, visor, breast plate, coat of mail, epaulets, elbow pieces, wrist guards, knee covers, neck plate and so on. Hence Maanikkavaachakar exhorts the devotees to 'don the armour of sacred ash', see stanza 1 of decad 46. This external ablution stands for an internal ablution, purifying the heart and mind.

The temple has usually five *prahaarams* i. e. courtyards separated by high walls and inter-connected by entrances, four in number, on the East, West, North and South, in the outermost wall and only one on each of the other walls, usually on the eastern section thereof.

These five courtyards represent the five sheaths of a human body viz., the *annamaya kosaa*, the *praanamaya kosaa* the *manomaya kosaa*, the *vignaanamaya kosaa* and the *aanandamaya kosaa*.*

The devotee crosses these entrances to the innermost court. This crossing represents the control of the five

* These can be translated as under : the sheath of food i. e., food transformed into flesh, the sheath of breath, the sheath of mind, the sheath of intellect and, ultimately, the sheath of bliss.

2. Keerththithiruvahaval 120

senses. At the sacrificial altar, he sacrifices his *aanava malam*, the taint of ignorance. At the flag post, he assumes a firmness of faith, a resoluteness of purpose, the purpose of worshipping God with one-pointed mind. He proceeds now to worship God in the *sanctum sanctorum* where the ever-burning light represents the eternal Effulgence.

There is another theme which runs through this decad. That is an account of the manner in which God enslaved Maanikkavaachakar stage by stage at various places by diverse means, unceasingly pouring grace on him and drawing him closer and closer for the ultimate embrace of eternal union.

The title and subtitle mean the same thing.

If we cast the poem in prose order, lines 100 to 102, which serve to introduce the description of the beatific vision related in lines 103 to 124, will also top the poem thus :

Were I to relate the manner in which
The Chieftain of Mahendra Hill
In the range where the *Vedaas* were revealed—
He of endless greatness,
Lord with charity towards all—
Enslaved us

and lines 1 to 99 will follow.

By using the first person plural in the phrase 'enslaved us', Maanikkavaachakar relates not only his own experience but also that of all the mystics who have gone before him. This will explain several of

the incidents in lines 1 to 99 which, according to tradition, occurred to others very long ago. Nevertheless, we will not be far wrong if we assume that Maanikka-vaachakar himself visited most or all of the shrines mentioned in these lines and that several of the experiences connected with those places occurred to Maanikkavaachakar himself. As many as 45 incidents of grace are related in these lines.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

Were I to relate the manner in which
the Chieftain of Mahendra hill
in the range where the Vedaas were revealed —
He of endless greatness,
Lord of Charity towards all —
enslaved us,

(I can tell you how) **He of the holy Feet** —

1*

Who danced in the age-old city of Thillai,
Who, performing His dance unceasingly
in the hearts of the manifold beings,
shines resplendently

with countless manifold qualities,

3*

Who creates and destroys the earth, the skies,
the world of the heavenly ones
and rich cultures besides —

5

1. For the sake of saving space, the phrase "(I can tell you how/of)" has been abridged in later lines to "(I...how/of)".

3. 'countless manifold qualities' — though the Thirukkural speaks of only eight attributes of God, they are indeed manifold.

dispelled in its entirety my darkness :

6*

(I can ... how) the **First Principle**—
the Grand One,

Who has taken dwelling with welling love
in the hearts of devotees —

seated on the eternal mighty Mahendra mountain,
graciously **created** the Aagamaas

(later) told (by Him to Uma, His spouse) :

10

(I can tell how) in Kallaadam,
merging graciously with pleasure
in the image therein,

He gained bliss in the company of the good Dame : 12*

(I can tell how) in Panchappalli,

in the company of Her with voice sweet as milk,

He showered unstinting lavish sweet grace :

13, 14

(I can tell how), in the guise of a hunter,

15 to

He sported in the goodly pool

6. The word 'dispelled' is printed in bold type. Earlier, in line 1, the words 'He of the holy feet' are also printed in bold type. This is to help the reader to understand that the lines which lie between the words "He of the holy feet" and "dispelled" are adjectival clauses qualifying "He of the holy feet" and that the subject is "He of the holy feet" and the predicate is "dispelled". Whenever the reader comes across words printed in bold type, he should learn to link them and follow the flow of the sentence.

10. i. 'Aagamaas' — see note to line 4 of decad 1.

10. ii. 'told to Uma' — see Appendix III.

12. 'good Dame' — Uma.

15-16. i. see Appendix III.

15-16. ii. 'sported in the goodly pool' — in terms of the Thirukkural (1218), where the husband becomes a lover in the arms of his wife in her dreams, here too, the Lord should be taken as resting on the bosom of Uma in her dreams.

| | |
|---|-----|
| formed by the close-set breasts of Her with <i>kinjuka</i> flower-like red lips : | 16* |
| (I can tell how), becoming a fisherman, He killed the <i>keliru</i> fish | |
| and recovered the great scrolls of the Aagamaas ; | 18* |
| and the rest, seated on Mahendra hill, | 19* |
| with His five faces He dictated in His grace : | 20* |
| (I ... how), in Nandhampaadi, as the four Vedaas incarnate, and as supreme One of limitless magnificence, He was graciously seated : | |
| (I ... how), assuming diverse forms and habitudes, with hundreds and hundreds of thousand natures, the Lord of the universe Who has the bull for steed, | 25 |
| He and his Lady Who is a part of Him | 26* |
| thus graciously came | |
| that the world may be redeemed : | 27* |
| (I ... how), bringing the horses along with Him, in the western country He graciously arrived, | 28* |

15-16. iii. '*Kinjuka*' — the scarlet red flower of the tree *erithrina indica* called *mullu murukkai* in Tamil.

18. 'recovered'-recovered the undamaged remnants of the scrolls of the Aagamaas.

19. 'the rest'-the mutilated parts.

20. see Appendix III.

26. 'He and the Lady Who is a part of Him'-see also lines 64 & 65 of decad 3 and stanza 18 of decad 10 where a full description of this composite form is given. See also note to line 77.

27. This line states the purpose of the diverse forms which God takes, some of which are described in the foregoing lines and several more in the lines which follow to end of line 99.

28. 'in the western country'-environs of Madurai which lie to the west of Thirupperunthurai.

very cleverly, with the band of horse-traders :

(I ... how), in Velampuththoor,
He graciously bestowed
the javelin (on Uggirakumaarar) 30
and showed the splendour of His form,
according to His wont :

(I can tell how), at Saanthampuththoor,
in the mirror (of the mind) 31*
of the hunter who wields the bow,
He bestowed an artefact —
(the Sword of Discrimination) :

(I ... how), while the Lord (as a syce), in His grace,
tied the nose-bag, 33*

He showed to the Paandiyan king,
as of old, His entire pillar-of-fire form :
(I can tell how), He, Who cannot be assessed
by Brahmaa and Vishnu, 35

rendered help to me by changing foxes into horses :
(I ... how), He sold the equine beasts
to the Paandiyan,
but did not agree to receive the vast quantity of gold,
that His beauty-endowed sacred feet

31. 'in the mirror of the mind' — When the hunter was seated in contemplation of the Lord, God clove his mind with the Sword of Discrimination of the Real and gave him enlightenment. This sword is said to be one of the weapons in the hands of Civan; (see stanza 1 of decad 46). See also page 96.

33. 'tied the nose-bag' — tied it over the nose of one of the horses which He (God) had brought as remounts for Paandiyan's cavalry, in fulfilment of the assurance He had given to Maanikkavaachakar at Perunthurai. On that occasion, God, in His abundant grace, disclosed Himself to the Paandiyan king.

may, in His grace, enslave him ; 40
 and how, He, Who so enslaved him,
 displayed, as of old, His effulgence,
 which impels me to stay ever in the path
 of the grace of Him, my King :
 (I ... of) the manner in which, becoming a Brahmin, 42*
 He graciously enslaved me
 and showed me His magical powers
 (such as materialising and vanishing at will) :
 (I can tell of) the code by which, 44 to-
 in the goodly great vast city of Madurai,
 He turned into a horse-groom ; 45*
 and of the way in which, in that same place,
 on behalf of her—His devotee —
 He graciously carried the dug-up earth
 as if to the manner born : 47*
 (I ... of) His mode of abiding in Uththarakosamangai
 and showing Himself as enlightenment incarnate :
 I ... of) the ancient manner
 of His graciously abiding resplendently in Poovanam, 50
 and showing His pure beautiful body :
 (I ... of) His gracious courtesy in sweetly arriving
 at Vaadavoor 53*

42. 'becoming a Brahmin'—this refers to the occasion on which the Lord came in the form of a Brahmin (*guru*) at Perunthurai.

44-45. 'code'—the established principle of God to ever and always help His devotees.

53. i. This has a link with the miracle of bringing the horses for Paandivan's cavalry. Maanikkavaachakar, in his anxiety, seems to have gone up as far as Vaadavoor on the way from Thirupperunthurai to Madurai in order to meet Civan half-way.

and revealing the sound of the *cilambu* on His feet : 53*
 (I can tell of) His becoming the *guru*
 in beauty-brimming Perunthurai,
 and of His guile in disappearing
 in the Effulgence which is the womb of all things : 55*
 (I ... of) the manner in which He destroyed my sins,
 appearing in sweet splendour in Poovalam :
 (I ... how) a timely helper He became
 by turning into a servant of good parts
 and setting up an army canteen
 for supplying drinking water to Paandiyan's army
 that it may gain victory :
 (I can tell of) His code (of love) 60
 when He, on that (memorable) day,
 turned up as a stranger in Venkaadu,
 and was seated under the *kurundha* tree : 61*
 (I can tell how), in Pattamangai,
 He abode in His own right,
 and graciously bestowed
 (on His former hand-maidens)
 the eight great mystical powers : 62-63
 (I ... of) His great guile when, becoming a hunter,
 and assuming the form suitable to the occasion,
 (He helped a Paandiyan in his war with a Chola King),
 (and) later disappeared in the forest :

53. ii. 'sound of the *cilambu*' – one type of phonic phenomena which contemplatives experience.

55. Please refer to line 145 of the decad.

61. While it is generally accepted that God came as a *guru* at Perunthurai and was seated there under a *kurundha* tree, He seems to have been seated under a *kurundha* tree in Venkaadu as well as at Uththarakosamangai. Perhaps, He came as a *guru* more than once.

- (I ... of) the manner in which,
 assuming the form most apt,
 He became a person suitable to the need,
 and proved the truth
 (of the commander-in-chief's statement): 67*
- (I ... of) the manner in which in Ori, a hamlet,
 He became a child of greatest glory on earth: 68-69*
- (I ... how) in Pandoor He abode in stately manner,
 and how in the island to the south of Thevoor,
 true to His code, He assumed a form,
 every inch a king: 70-72
- (I ... of) His benevolence in bestowing enlightenment
 In Thiruvaaroor of honey-yielding groves: 73-74
- (I ... of) that occasion in which, in Idaimaruthu,
 He abode in stately manner,
 and planted therein the imprint of His divine feet: 75-76
- (I ... of) the manner in which
 He abode at ease in Ekambam
 and became in part a woman: 78*
- (I ... of) the manner in which He,
 abiding with splendour of Tiruvaanchiyam,
 sported with Her of highly fragrant tresses: 79-80
- (I ... of) the ways in which

67. 'and proved the truth' etc., - Just as Maanikkavaachakar spent in other ways the money given by the king to buy horses, similarly, the commander-in-chief of a previous Paandiyan spent in feeding God's devotees the money given by his king to raise an army. When asked by the king to produce the army before him, the commander-in-chief was in a dilemma. God came to his rescue by coming with a heavenly host in the guise of mercenaries.

68-69. See Appendix III.

78. 'and became in part a woman' - see Appendix III.

He became a soldier carrying a strong bow
 and displayed many many manifestations of His form
 (on the battle-field) : 81-82
 (I ... of) His abiding in Kadamboor ;
 of His showing His beauty on Eengoi hill ;
 of His becoming a **caivaachaariya brahmin** in Aiyaaru ; 85*
 of His abiding with pleasure in Thuruththi ;
 of His becoming a desired-for-One in Thiruppanaiyur ;
 of His giving a vision of Himself in Kazhumalam ;
 of His abiding unfailingly in Kazhukkundru ; 89
 of His bestowing, in His grace,
 many ethical texts in Purampayam ; 90
 and of His abiding in the form of a symbol in Kuttraalam ;
 (I ... how) the **First Principle** — 92 to
 our King, the merciful transcendental One,
 Who, containing in Himself
 the aspect of each and every being,
 becomes the sole Being —
 concealing His fiery form of limitless glory,
arrived, in His grace, as if by magic,
 bearing a beautiful form,
 and, becoming a savant of Chandra-dhweep,
 descended from inter-stellar space,
and, in His grace, **stayed** in beautiful Paalai
 in great state, in His own charming way. 99
 Were I to relate the manner in which 100 to
 the Chieftain of Mahendra hill
 in the range where the Vedaas were revealed —

85. 'caivaachaariya brahmin'— when a brahmin whose turn it was to perform the worship in the temple at Thiruvayyaaru failed to turn up for duty, Lord Civan took his form and officiated in his place.

He of endless greatness,
 Lord of charity (towards all) —
 enslaved us : 102
 On His holy form of power and indwelling beauty,
 lines of the sacred ash showed at intervals ; 103-104*
 the Bliss which entirely roots out all foibles 105
 was the channel of His coming ;
 the cosmic sound of the Onkhaaraa
 from the great drum
 of the very great Lord of mercy
 with the Dame as one half of Him
 was resounding everywhere ;
 He who enslaves one,
 that one may not be tainted by the three *malams*,
 was holding in His hand the three pronged spear ; 110
 the spark-emitting Effulgence of pure hue,
 Who severs the original three *malams*,
 becoming my beloved,
 was wearing the garland of *kazhuneer* flowers 113*
 to great advantage as most becoming Him ;
 what shall I say of the manner in which He,
 Whom Vishnu as well as Brahmaa cannot assess, 115
 rode the steed ;
 He, Who graciously bestows
 the path of no return (to the cycle of births),
 deemed Paandinaadu itself as His ancient domain ;
 He, Who lifts to the loftiest of lofty states

103-104. these two lines are usually interpreted as referring to the banner of Civan. I follow, however, Maraimalaiadigal whose interpretation appeals to me.

113. 'kazhuneer flowers' —purple Indian water lily, *nymphaea odorata*.

those servitors who are devoted to Him,
 had Uththarakosamangai as His capital city ; 120
 'Deva-devan Who showers grace
 on even the primal deities'
 was His sacred name ;
 the bliss that drives away all ignorance
 was His steed ;
 the greatness of His condescendingly showing grace
 to all creatures was His mountain throne. 124
 Thus my Lord, in His grace, enslaved
 (in the aforesaid manner)
 people of whatsoever great merit 125-126
 and of howsoever sorts.
 But He bade me, this cur, 127 to
 to come to His form-pervading hall
 in goodness abounding Thillai,
 and, in His grace, abandoned me here,
 while, as the grace-receiving devotees —
 who went along with Him that day — 130
 each and each merged in Him,
 He too, in His grace, coalesced with them. 131
 While some of those who could not attain Him 132 to
 jumped into fire,
 and others became bewildered and fainted off,
 while more fell to the ground and rolled and wailed,
 while others, with hurrying feet,
 running faster than a river rushing to enter the sea,
 and clamouring between sobs, " Oh Lord, Our Lord ",
 reached His feet,
 and gained those feet,
 while still others who were heart-wearied

and longed for Him,

hailed Him saying :

“Oh Supreme Dancer Who showed grace to Pathanjali”,
and continued to yearn for Him, 139

(while all this happened),

Our King —

140 to

the supreme ancient One of reverberating Kailaash
Who dances in Puliyoor’s golden-roofed
shimmering hall

which bears the aspect of beauty-endowed Himaalyaa—
with a wee smile playing on His holy face,
the sort of smile which He graciously bestowed
on Kaali and Uma with kovvai-like red lips,
graciously **entered** the resplendent Puliyoor
along with His throng of devotees. 146

Thiruchchitrambalam.

3. THIRUVANDA-P-PAHUTHI

Adoring Civan’s Gross Essence

(Sung at Thillai)

Thiruvanda-p-pahuthi is a composite word made up
of *Thiru* (sacred) *anda* (sphere), and *pahuthi* (section)
i. e., “The Sacred Section on the Spheres”.

‘Adoring Civan’s Gross Essence’ is the sub-title of
this decad. Broadly speaking, it deals with the imma-

140 to 146. i. ‘Puliyoor’ — another name for Thillai, modern Chidambaram.

140. to 146. ii. ‘Kovvai’ — a kind of *Bryonia*, a creeper, the fruit of which is edible and turns red when ripe.

nent nature of the Godhead. But, as is always the case with Upanishadic literature, with spontaneous outpourings of the heart and with autobiographical works—an amalgam of all of which is *The Thiruvaachakam*—this decad is a mixture of all the three elements.

Lines 1 to 28 deal with the immanent nature of the Godhead and conclude with the phrase, 'not only that'. Lines 29 to 54 deal with the nirguna and saguna Brahman, i. e., God without and with attributes. Lines 55 to 64 relate in indisputable terms (a personal experience.) Lines 65 to 95 are a remarkable poetic presentation of God as a rain-cloud, a presentation which heads a long passage in praise of God ending with line 161, the whole of which forms a mighty build-up to demonstrate the magnitude of the grace received with great ease by Maanickavaachakar. Lines 117 to 123 describe this grace, and in their turn refer back to the personal experience related in lines 55 to 64. Lines 124 to 157 again relate the experience with fresh amazement, welling love and gratitude. Lines 124 to 145 describe the inaccessibility of the Godhead, which, however became so easily accessible to Maanikkavaachakar. Lines 146 to 157 relate his experience when God came to him as a guru in Thirup-
perunthurai. Lines 158 to 161 are reminiscent of lines 130, 131, of decad 2. Line 162 relates the special grace shown to him, and lines 163 to 182 relate the nature of the experience of apprehending the Godhead.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

The globular concourses
of this section of the Universe
with their immeasurableness and lush appearance
and the way they excel each other in beauty —
if one were to speak of these,
they sprawl a hundred crores and more.
Making them look small like the crowded specks
in a ray of sunlight streaming into a house, 5
a big one is God.

And if one were to research into it,
the hordes of Brahmaas and multitudes of Vishnus,
emergence, existence,
and the very great cataclysm
associated with the end of all things,
redemption therefrom and reestablishment,
all these microcosms and macrocosms, 10
like eddies of wind
within the blast of a devastating tornado,
He spins and makes them swirl about —
The eternal Youth. 12*

He is the ancient One
Who creates the creators of the entire Universe ; 13
He is the God Who guards those
Who guard the creatures ;
He is the One Who withdraws into Himself
those that have been guarded ;
He is the mindful One Who is unmindful — 15

12. 'Youth' — contrast with 'hoary One' in lines 16-19.

(till the appointed time) —
of those whom He had withdrawn.

He is the hoary One before Whom 17 to
the group of the heavenly ones,
who represent deliverance
to the six category of people
belonging to the dazzling six kinds of religions,
look like worms. 19*

The day after day rising sun
He endows with effulgence ; 20
the resplendent moon He endows with coolness ;
He creates the heat in the fire of great might ;
to the eternal ether He gives pervasiveness ;
the glorious wind receives its energy from Him ;
to the streams that meander in the shade,
It is He who gives them their sweet savour ; 25
He endows the earth with its conspicuous firmness.

Thus and thus, many crores of things and more,
in such and such measure (as befits each),
with their respective qualities He endows.
Not merely that.

Behold the primeval One ! Behold the whole One ! 29*

17 to 19. ' six kinds of religions ' — commentators are not agreed on what these six kinds of religions are; but they all are agreed that they are not the religions which have Ganapathy, Murugan, Sakthi, the Sun, Vishnu and Rudhraa as their respective Gods. There is reason to believe that these are: *Niyaayam, Vaiseshikam, Saankiyam, Yogam, Poorva Meemaamsam and Uththara Meemaasam*. (Vide pagc 237, column 1 of *Kalai-k-kalanjiyam Vol. 5*).

29. ' the whole One ' — compare with the Upanishadic invocation :
"Om ! That is Whole, This is Whole ; out of the Whole this whole (universe) has come out ; Out of the Whole, the whole having been

Behold verily Him without a peer ! 30
 Behold Him who wears the fang
 of the ancient boar !
 Behold Him of the loin
 with the pelt of the wild tiger !
 Behold the ash-smeared One !
 The more and more I brood on it,
 take note I cannot endure (His separation) ;
 alas, I will be ruined !
 Behold Him who is inherent (in creatures)
 like sweet music in the Veenai ! 35
 Behold Him Who discovered that music therein ! 36*
 Behold the transcendent One !
 Behold the Ancient one !
 Behold the great One
 Whom Brahmaa and Vishnu did not see !
 Behold the miraculous One ! Behold the Many !
 Behold the age-old One
 Who transcends words and phrases ! 40
 Behold the far One
 Whom even the mind cannot reach !
 Behold Him who falls into the net of devotion !
 Behold the One called the unique One !
 Behold Him Who pervades
 throughout the wide universe !

taken out, yet the Whole remains as It was." The epithets, ' the whole One ', ' uncut Gem ', unpierced Pearl ' all reflect this same thought. Lao Tse, the great Chinese mystic of the 6th Century B. C., uses the epithet ' undressed wood ' in the same sense.

36. Tradition has it that Civan was the first to evoke music from the Veenai, the greatest of all Indian stringed musical instruments.

Behold the One more minute
than the minuteness of an atom ! 45

Behold Eesan of unparalleled greatness !
Behold the rare One, Rarest of all rarities !
Behold the One Who permeates all things
and rears them !
Behold the subtle One
Whom book-knowledge does not comprehend !
Behold Him Who stretches
from top to bottom of the Universe ! 50

Behold Him Who transcends beginning and end !
Behold Him Who causes bondage and deliverance !
Behold Him Who is the stationary ones
and the motile ones !
Behold Him Who has seen aeons and their end !
Behold Eesan Whom everyone is entitled
to apprehend ! 55*

55. Aldous Huxley says: "A question now, quite naturally, presents itself: who is called to that highest form of prayer which is contemplation? The answer is unequivocally plain. All are called to contemplation, because all are to achieve deliverance, which is nothing else but the knowledge that unites the knower with the known, namely the eternal Ground or Godhead. The oriental exponents of the Perennial Philosophy would probably deny that everyone is called here and now, in this particular life; they would say, it may be to all intent and purposes impossible for a given individual to achieve more than a partial deliverance, such as personal survival in some kind of 'heaven', from which there may be either an advance to total liberation or else a return to those material conditions which, as all the masters of the spiritual life agree, are so uniquely propitious for taking the cosmic intelligence test that results in enlightenment."

If Aldous Huxley had added that, according to the oriental exponents, ultimately everyone gains deliverance, he would have admirably rounded off his exposition.

Behold Civan Whom even the *devaas* do not know !
 Behold Him with the aspects of the male,
 the female and the neuter !
 Behold Him Whom even I saw with my eyes !
 Behold the Ambrosia Which yields grace in abundance !
 Note that I saw His greatness of mercy ! 60
 (For) behold He stepped on earth
 with His rosy feet (for my sake) ! 61*
 Note that I was convinced that He was Civan !
 Note that He, in His grace, enslaved me !
 Behold Him who has Her with blue lotus-like eyes
 as a part of Him !
 Behold simultaneously Her and Him ! 65
 The Ancient Sea of transcendent Bliss itself, 66*
 forming as a great dark cloud,
 rose to the hill of holiness abounding Perunthurai,
 and while the dazzle of lightning of apt beauty
 spread in every direction, 69
 while the glossy snake—the binding five senses—
 scuttled away, 70
 while the cruel torturous peak of summer withdrew,

The 55th line of this decad states all this quite unequivocally in a single line. No one is denied deliverance. Deliverance is the inviolable right of every soul.

61. By the sheer weight of the unanimity among the commentators on the interpretation of this line, I have reluctantly translated it as it stands above. The line in the original, however, lends itself, more naturally, in my opinion, to be translated thus : “ Note that I touched His rosy feet here on earth ! ”. This translation will fit in very well in eed with the foregoing line and the succeeding line, and will, furthermore, fit in with the assertive declaration of a personal experience which lines 55 to 65 make.

66. ‘ Ancient Sea Bliss ’ — God.

while the long-stalked beauteous *thondri*
 shone in blazing colour 72*
 and the cochineals swarmed in greater profusion
 than my births, 73*
 thunder rolled and resounded like (war) drums
 out of very great grace.
 And while the *kaanthal* showed a flowery symbol
 of palms joined in worship, 75*
 unstinting sweet grace formed into tiny drops,
 and a rosy sparkling flood sprang up
 in every direction, 77
 rendering ineffective the pond of misery 78
 where the long-eyed thirsty herd of deer
 (frightened mankind)
 drank large mouthfuls of this mirage
 of the twice three religions
 and wearily tottered about with no relief
 of their cruel great thirst. 79-82*

72. '*thondri*' — a plant whose tuberous root lies dormant in the earth till the onset of the rains when it shoots up and puts out profuse bright-red flowers. Since it flowers in November-December, the Tamil month of Kaarthikai, it is also called '*Kaarthikai-p-poo*', Rev. G. U. Pope call this, in a foot-note, *Gloriosa superba*, but in the text, he translates the word as '*hibiscus*' which, however, is a dicotyledon while *thondri* is a monocotyledon.

73. '*cochineals*' — a scarlet red insect, velvety soft to the touch which appears in profusion during the rainy season.

75. '*Kaanthal*' — *gloriosa superba*. *Thondri* referred to in line 72 is also one variety of *Kaanthal*. The petals of the *Kaanthal* in bloom suggest the fair translucent fingers of a beautiful person. Hence, women's fingers are often compared to the *Kaanthal* flower in Tamil literature.

79-82. 'the mirage of the twice three religions' — refer to lines 17 to 19 of this decad and note thereto.

Then the flood rushed into the great heavenly river,
 and, swelling up in huge whirlpools of bliss,
 attacked the shores of our bonds of *paasam*,
 and, undermining and demolishing them, 85
 uprooted our huge tree of twin-deeds
 which had shot up to great height
 (life after life).

The devotee ploughmen built a lofty dam
 at the junction of huge mountains,
 and guided therein the beauteous waters of grace ;
 they further formed an outlet
 into a honey-dripping fragrant lotus filled tank, 90
 and, watching with delight the waters
 rise higher and higher
 in the tank
 with bunds where bumble bees were buzzing
 over a huge pall of smoke
 rising from abundant piles of eagle-wood,
 they sowed seeds of love in the field of worship.

Hallowed be You,
 Oh Cloud rare to be gained in the world,
 Who bestowed on those devotee ploughmen
 A surfeit of harvest ! 88 to 95*
 Hallowed be the God with a waist band

66 to 95. In these lines is found a beautiful allegory in which the Ancient Sea of transcendent Bliss, the Cloud and the Lightning are God; the glossy snake is the five senses which bind man to earthy things even as the coil of a snake binds its victim; cruel torturous summer is the suffering which is the portion of unregenerate man; the suddenly flowering *thondri* is the sudden appearance of God in the guise of a *guru* of resplendent aspect; the myriad cochineals are the numerous births a soul takes; the thundering drum is God's righteous wrath at man's

of black hooded snake !

Hallowed be the Beginning of all things

Who bestows grace on eminent contemplatives !

Hallowed be the Knight Who dispelled my fears !

Hallowed be the One Who, for certain,

pulls one unto Himself and assumes over-lordship !

Hallowed be Him Who wipes away

the enveloping great misery !

100

Hallowed be Him Who gives sweet ambrosia

to those who have reached Him !

Hallowed be Him Who curvets about in a dance

in the pitch darkness !

102*

Hallowed be the Lover of Her with arms

shapely like a big bamboo !

103*

Hallowed be our Lord Who has no attachment

to those who have no attachment to Him !

Hallowed be the (saved up) Hoard-

to devotees in needy times !

105

Obeisance to our very own One

Who charmed the poisonous snake !

106*

Obeisance to the great One Who made me god-mad !

endless revolutions on the cycle of births and deaths ; and the *kaanthai* is the palms of devotees joined in grateful adoration. The rest of the allegory is plain from the text itself.

102. 'dance in the pitch darkness' — see extract from *The Cloud of Unknowing* on pages 94 to 96.

103. 'big bamboo' — Women's arms are compared in Tamil poetry to a bamboo, on account of their having joints like the knots of a bamboo, their slenderness in between the joints, their shiny smoothness of surface and the golden colour like that of a ripe bamboo. Here the word big is used to denote that the arms were not puny.

106. This line refers to a miracle performed by Lord Civan to bring to life a man bitten by a snake.

Obeisance to Him capable of materialising
with the sacred ash on Him !

He is the One who makes ambulant
the ambulant creatures
and makes dormant the dormant ones.
He is the One who makes stationary
the stationary ones.

He is the ancient One
transcending verbal expression — 110
the One who cannot be comprehended by the workings
of the mind.

He is the One Who is not capable of perception
by the eye and the rest (of the sense-organs).

He is the One who ordained the ether
and other elements to appear.

The superb One,
Who, like the fragrance of flowers,
rising high and filling everywhere without omission,
pervades everything, 115

that Effulgent Being Who, for my sake,
coming today without any effort on my part
did away with the body which spells ruin ; 118

He came today without any effort on my part
and abode in me ;

Obeisance to Him !

He made for me a body which yields ecstasy ;
Obeisance to Him ! 120*

118-120 — Jalal-uc-din Rumi enlightens us on these lines thus :

“ The spiritual way ruins the body and, having ruined it,
restores it to prosperity ;

“ Ruined the house for the sake of the golden treasure,
and with that same treasure builds it better than before ;

Obeisance to Him Who, abiding in me
 like an eternal spring, delights my mind !
 I do not wish to bear any longer this body
 which is not able to contain the exquisite bliss
 which overruns it with waves.

While He shone (for me) with a golden light,
 comprising the lightning-like flash
 of a heap of emeralds and a cluster of rubies, 125-126*
 from Brahmaa (and Vishnu) who searched for Him,
 He hid Himself :

From those who toiled to see Him
 with one-pointed mind in the traditional manner,
 He hid Himself :

From those who, to the grief of their kinsmen,
 sought Him with single-minded devotion,
 He hid Himself :

From those who, staking their faith
 in the power of the Vedic *mantraas*,
 laboriously sought Him, He hid Himself :

130

"Cut off the water and cleansed the river-bed,
 then caused drinking water to flow into it ;

"Cleft the skin and drew out the barb,
 then made fresh skin grow over the wound ;

"Razed the fortress and took it from the infidel,
 then reared thereon a hundred towers and ramparts.

"Sometimes the action of God appears like this,
 sometimes the contrary :
 (true) religion is nothing but bewilderment."

125 - 126 'emeralds and rubies' these refer to the composite
 form of Civan — part male, part female -- in which Parvathi (swarthy
 in colour) is like emeralds and Civan (flame-like in colour) is like
 rubies.

From those who boasted to see Him
 by some rare device,
 by the same device, there itself,
 did He hide Himself :

He looked on dispassionately (at sectarians) 132*
 and took them into His fold out of welling grace ;
 yet, He now appeared (to them) as a male,
 anon changed to a neuter object,
 and presently as female with a shining forehead,
 and thus hid His true self from them. 135

Bidding the five senses stay far behind,
 seeking refuge in inaccessible hills,
 with bodies stripped of all but the bare breath,
 ascetics in contemplation dwell on Him :
 From their vision He securely hid Himself. 138

From those with the kind of knowledge
 which vacillates between
 “ God is, God is not ”, 139*
 He hid Himself.

And from those too who said :

“ Whenever of old we strove to find Him, 140*
 even today when we strive, He hides Himself ;
 that Thief we have found now.

132. ‘sectarians’—see lines 52, 53 of decad 4. As stated in the *Thirumandiram*, Civan, in His overwhelming grace, takes the worshippers of various gods as worshippers of Himself only. Nevertheless, in view of their erroneous belief, He hides Himself now in a female form (to followers of *Yaamalam* and *Vaamam* cult), in a male form (to those of the *Paasupatham* and *Paancharaathram* cult) and in a neuter form (to followers of the *Mruthi* cult who worship the sun, the moon, the Ganga etc.)

139. “God is, God is not”—such as the creed of Jains, “*asthi, naa asthi*”, i. e., It is, It is not.

Raise a hue and cry, raise a hue and cry ;
 with garlands woven
 of this morning's (fresh) blossoms,
 fetter His feet ;
 surrounded Him, encircle Him, follow Him,
 don't leave Him, catch hold of Him."

He, eluding their grasp, completely hid Himself. 145

On the One without a peer coming Himself
 and relating His '*I alone am*' nature,
 that people like me may pay heed to it,
 and on His challengingly hailing me
 and assuming lordship over me,
 and, in His grace, showing Himself to me
 in the guise of a Brahmin,
 I, with uncloying love melting my bones, 150
 wailed with loud lamentation,
 and, clamouring louder
 that the surf of the billowing sea,
 fell down with my head all topsy-turvy,
 and rolled and wailed.

Madder than madmen,
 more gleeful than frenzied men,
 to the puzzlement of the citizens
 and the wonderment of the hearers,
 worse than a rutting elephant
 which would not be mounted, 155
 I was beside myself.

(In this state),
 with tasty honey from high limbs of tall trees
 He fashioned my limbs anew. 157

Even as He toppled the ancient (three) cities
 of the foes
 into the fire caused by His beaming smile, 158, 159*
 He consigned in the great fire of His grace
 the base dwellings (of the souls) of all of us devotees, 160
 with none being left out.

He became to me even like the *nelli* fruit
 on one's stretched palm. 162*

I know not what to say !

Blessed be You !

Is this proper ?

Ah me, a mere cur, I cannot sustain this.

What You to me have done, I cannot comprehend ;

Ah, I am dead.

To me, your slave, 165

what You in Your grace have given,

I know not :

With mere sipping, I am not content ;
 (greedily) swallowing, I cannot take it in.

Like the waves of the rich cool sea of milk
 and like the waters in midsea

on full moon day,

filling the core of my mind to overflowing,
 and begging all description,

158, 159. These lines refer to the occasion on which, at the request of the *devaas*, Civan destroyed the three flying fortresses (made of iron, silver and gold respectively) belonging to three haughty harassing *asuraas* (non *devaas*) by means of a fire caused by His mere smile, even though He was armed with a bow and arrow of extra-ordinary origin and prowess. This incident is referred to again in the 1st stanza of decad 14.

162. '*nelli* fruit' — *phyllanthus*; the fruit is translucent and is used in literature to signify anything very clear to one's mind.

ambrosia sweet to collect in each hair root of my body, 170
He ordained.

Within this cur's frame,
through every fibre of this wretch's carnal body,
injecting sweet honey with the aid of a *kurambu*, 173*
He pumped streams filled with marvellous ambrosia
right to the cavities of the bones. 171 to 175
And, as if with my melting heart
He fashioned a new form,
an ecstasy-bubbling body he created for me.
Ultimately, He made me be
even like the complacent elephant
which had fed on choice sugar-cane and wood-apples.
Thus, when in me Mercy's pure honey he mixed, 180
In His grace, He made even me, of lowliest rank,
surpassing ambrosia sweet—
He of a nature which neither Brahmaa nor Vishnu know.

Thiruchchitrambalam

4. POTTRI-TH-THIRUVAHAVAL

Creation of the Universe

(Sung at Thillai)

Pottri-th-thiruvahaval is a composite word made up of *Pottri*, (obeisance) *thiru* (sacred) and *ahaval* (blank verse), i. e., "Sacred Blank Verse of Obeisance".

This decad is so called because the word 'Pottri'—obeisance or salutation—occurs at the end of 138 out

173. '*Kurambu*'—probably, something like a syringe, or an intravenous injection needle.

of 225 lines of this decad. Lines 1 to 9 are attributes to the feet of the Lord, line 10 ends with the word 'coming' in line 75. The intervening lines, 11 to 74, relate the birth of a soul as a human being, the dangers it has to escape while even in the mother's womb (lines 14 to 25), the sorrows and dangers it has to face in the world (lines 26 to 41), the innumerable obstacles which the world places in the path of a man when the thought of the existence of God is born in his mind and he tries to seek and gain Him (lines 42 to 58) and the manner in which he surmounts them (lines 59 to 86). Line 87 states how the Lord responds to such a seeker and nurtures him like a mother. Lines 88 to the end are salutations to the Lord.

The sub-title is "Creation of the Universe". The Tamil grammar has an axiomatic saying viz., when we say 'the world' it means the noble people therein only. In the light of this saying, this decad describes the birth and growth of the noble soul of a contemplative, see lines 11 to 87.

The first four decads with their subtitles, lay down, in a manner of speaking, the elements of the creed to which a contemplative shall have to subscribe before setting out on the Journey to the Godhead.

The Decad

Thi-uchchitrambalam

The sacred tall Vishnu with scintillating crown,
 who with two lengths of his foot
 measured off the earth and the heavens,

1 to

while Brahmaa and the rest of the heavenly ones
 gathered around him worshipping him,
 and the sages at all the four points
 of the earth stood
 with all their five senses blossoming with joy,
 and saluted him, - 4*
 that same Vishnu, impelled by a desire to know
 where Civan's feet end, 5
 turned into a boar of fierce might,
 and, rushing forward and digging
 through the seven underground worlds, got wearied, 7*
 and began to extol Civan by saying:
 "Oh First in each aeon, Victory, Victory to You!"
 That those twin feet which, even so, he could not see,
 may be easy of worship in this vast see-girt world, 10
 Lord Civan came down on earth as *guru* supreme. 10 a*
 Beginning with the elephant
 and ending with the ant,
 escaping from their extinctionless wombs
 through virtue of good karma, 12*
 escaping during conception in human form

1 to 4: These lines refer to the *Vaamana avataar* of Vishnu in which he came as a pigmy to Bali, a haughty king, and begged from him a piece of land, the size of three lengths of his foot. When the King very superciliously granted his wish, Vishnu grew to colossal heights and measured off the earth and the heavens with two lengths of his foot, and, with no place for the third length, he put his foot on the head of the king and trod him down into the bowels of the earth.

7. Compare with opening lines of stanza 10 of decad 7.

10a. This line is brought over here from line 75; lines 11 to 74 are a long parenthetical passage between lines 10 and 75.

12. 'extinctionless' - the species having survived from the days of creation.

from the throng of undiminishing germs
 in the mother's uterus, 14*
 escaping in the first moon from the danger
 of the *thaandri*-shaped foetus splitting into two, 15
 escaping in the second moon
 from the amorphous state,
 escaping in the third moon
 from the profusion of the uterine fluid,
 escaping in the twice two moons
 from the great darkness,
 escaping in the fifth moon from abortion,
 escaping in the sixth moon the scandalous pruritus, 20
 escaping in the seventh moon from premature birth,
 escaping in the eighth moon
 from tribulations (peculiar to that month),
 escaping in the ninth moon
 the troubles which come in that month,
 escaping in the awaited tenth moon
 from the midst of the sorrow of the sea of misery
 which a child suffers along with its mother ; 25
 escaping in the oncoming years
 from sorrows consequent on
 many things such as earning and hoarding ;
 escaping from the bother of morning ablutions,
 the midday's acute hunger,
 the midnight sleep, and travels ;
 escaping from the predatory piercing glances
 of women— 30 to
 of black tresses, red lips, pearly teeth,

14. Pope omits lines 14 to 25.

15. '*thaandri*' – fruit of *bellerica myrobalan* (*terminalia bellerica*).

unique charm of rainy season peacock,
 and closet-set, buxom, bra-bursting,
 irradiant, thrust forward, waist wearying,
 upturned, spread out young breasts
 with no room for even a tooth-pick to go in between;-35*
 escaping the rutting elephant called desire
 (which sports) in the wide large arena
 of deluded men of the world,
 escaping from the many seas called learning,
 escaping from the affliction called wealth,
 escaping from the ancient poison called poverty, 40
 escaping from (similar) manifold spheres
 of mean horizons ;
 (after escaping all these),
 when in the heart of contemplatives
 thought of God was born,
 and on that Being, Who is free from hate,
 contemplation set in,
 six crores of delusive powers
 severally began their illusive play. 45
 Neighbours—close friends all—gathered round
 and talked atheism
 till their tongues became calloused.
 Relatives, the ancestral herd of cattle,
 seized them, implored them,
 and became agitated.
 By and large, penance itself as supreme,
 Brahmins glibly proved by Vedic texts.
 Sectarian disputants,
 claiming their respective creeds only as perfect,

31-35. Pope leaves off these lines as hardly reproducible.

clamorously clashed (with each other).

The tornado called staunch *maayaa-vaadam*— 54*

(the dogma that the world is but an empty dream)—

swirled and blew and roared, 55

the while the conflicting cultural deadly poison

of Epicurianism—the dazzling doughty snake—

came and joined forces. 57*

While thereby, several great delusions

encompassed the contemplatives,

they swerved not,

but unflaggingly held on to their faith.

Like wax faced with fire, 60

with melting heart they worshipped, wept, trembled,

danced, shouted, sang, prayed.

Due to unintermitting pure love—

even like the artisan's vice and fools

who never let go what they catch hold of—

becoming firm in faith

like a nail driven into a green tree, 65

with tears increasingly trickling,

and mind in a whirl like the sea,

with heart-sore and body shivering in unison,

eschewing shyness

while the world laughed at them as ghouls,

and assuming people's scornful words

as ornament verily, 70

losing all casuistry, their intelligence in a whirl,

with the aimed-at-goal (of deliverance from birth)

as the supreme miracle,

54-57. *Maayaa-vaadam* and Epicurianism are the two poles of the concept of the world.

they remained unswerving in mind.
 And lowing and all atwitter like a calved cow,
 not thinking of another god even in a dream,
 not despising as a little thing 75 to
 the greatness of the grace of Him of unique heaven
 in coming down on earth and becoming *guru* supreme, 77
 His sacred twin feet,
 like their shadow which,
 now fore, not aft, but never knows separation,
 they never grew tired of.
 Their very bones softened and melted,
 their hearts yearned with sigh after sigh, 80
 the river called love overflowed its banks thither. 81*
 Their goodly senses coalesced,
 and they clamoured,
 " Oh Lord, our Sire ",
 while their speech stumbled,
 the hair on their bodies stood on end,
 their hands, the flowers,
 folded in worship into shape of lotus-bud,
 their hearts, flowers all, blossomed out, 84
 and their eyes flushed with delight, 85
 droplets dewing on them.
 While thus unswerving love all day long they cherished,
 their very Mother, Oh Lord, You became
 and brought them up. Obeisance to You ! 87
 Obeisance to the God
 Who, becoming a knowledge-of-Reality conferring Brahmin,
 can help one to destroy one's karma. 89*

81. 'thither' — towards the sacred twin feet (see line 78)

89. 'karma' — residual and accruing karma only, since *praaarabda* karma must be lived through and worked off.

- Obeisance to the King of golden Madurai ! 90
- Obeisance to the Gem of a *guru*
Who shines in Koodal ! 91*
- Obeisance to the Dancer
in the hall in Thillai in the south !
- Obeisance to You who have become
delicious ambrosia to me today !
- Obeisance to the One anterior
to the never-ageing four Vedaas !
- Obeisance to Civan of bull-rampant victorious flag ! 95
- Obeisance to the Sporter
Who assumes many forms
of lightning like brilliance !
- Obeisance to You,
the Fruition which stripped fibre from even a stone !
- Obeisance to You, Oh Hill of gold, do save me !
- Obeisance to You ! Ah, confer grace on me !
- Obeisance to You, Creator, Protector and Destroyer ! 100
- Obeisance to You, my Father, Who weeds my troubles !
- Obeisance to You, Oh Eesaa !
- Obeisance to You, Oh immanent One in every object !
- Obeisance to You, the Cluster of lustrous crystals !
- Obeisance Oh King ! Obeisance Oh Ambrosia !
- Obeisance to You,
Sporter with fragrance-laden feet ! 105
- Obeisance to You, Oh Preceptor !
Obeisance to You Oh Vimalaa !
- Obeisance to You, Oh primal One !
Obeisance to You, Oh Gnosis !

Obeisance to You, Oh Goal !

Obeisance to You, Oh Fruition !

Obeisance to You, Oh Hope

with river-mingled russet locks !

Obeisance to You, Oh Owner !

Obeisance to You, Oh Experience !

110

Obeisance to You who deigned

to enslave even base me !

Obeisance to You, Oh Sire !

Obeisance to You, Oh Atom !

Obeisance to You, Oh Caivaa !

Obeisance to You, Oh Chief !

113*

Obeisance to You, Oh Symbol,

Obeisance to You, Oh Attribute !

Obeisance to You, Oh Path (to bliss) !

Obeisance to You, Oh my (only) Thought ! 115

Obeisance to You, Oh Medicine

rare to the heavenly ones !

Obeisance to You,

Oh Lord easy of access to the rest !

Obeisance to You,

Oh King Who bestows your grace

that thrice seven generations of Your Kin (devotees)

may not sink into discordance-ridden hell !

Obeisance to You, Oh Pal !

Obeisance to You, Oh Succour !

120

Obeisance to You, Oh my Life !

Obeisance to You, Oh my Treasure !

Obeisance to You, Oh Free One !

Obeisance to You, Oh First One !

Obeisance to You, my Father !

Obeisance to You, Oh Haran !

Obeisance to You unique One Who transcends
speech and sense-perception !

Obeisance to You,

Harvest of the wide sea-girt world ! 125

Obeisance to You, Oh Beauteous One,
rare ; yet easy of access !

Obeisance to You, Oh Pupil of my eye

Who became the dark Cloud ! 127*

Obeisance to the eternal Mountain of holy grace ! 128*

Obeisance to You, Oh Knight,

Who made a somebody of even me
and placed Your great feet on my head ! 130

Obeisance to You Who wipes away

the troubles of worshipping hands ! 131*

Obeisance to You, destructionless Sea of Bliss !

Obeisance to You Who have transcended
destruction and creation !

Obeisance to You Oh first One

Who have transcended all things !

Obeisance to You, Oh Bridegroom of Her

with fawn-like glances ! 135

Obeisance to You,

Mother of the immortals of heaven !

Obeisance to You Who pervade the earth

as all the five elements ! 137

127. Compare with line 67 of decad 3.

128. Compare with line 16 of decad 1.

131. ' worshipping hands ' — devotees.

137 to 141. Earth is said to contain the qualities of all the five elements, (see lines 22 to 26 of decad 3). Water is said to contain the

- Obeisance to You Who appear in water as four !
 Obeisance to You Who shine in fire as three !
 Obeisance to You Who delight in wind as two ! 140
 Obeisance to You Who happen in ether
 as (only) one ! 141
 Obeisance to You Ambrosia
 in the minds of ripe devotees !
 Obeisance to You rare (of access)
 even in dreams to the *devaas* !
 Obeisance to You Who, even in my wakeful state,
 showed grace to me, a cur !
 Obeisance to You our Father,
 Who abides in Idaimaruthu ! 145
 Obeisance to You Who bear the Ganga in Your locks !
 Obeisance to You, Oh King Who abides in Aavoor !
 Obeisance to You of beauty-filled Tiruvaiyaaru !
 Obeisance to You our Father in Annaamalai !
 Obeisance to You, Sea of eye-delighting ambrosia ! 150
 Obeisance to You our Father
 Who abides in Ekambam !
 Obeisance to You
 Who became (therein) a part-woman Personage !
 Obeisance to You transcendent One
 Who abide in Paraaiththurai !
 Obeisance to You Civan Who abide in Ciraappalli !
 Support other than You I do not know here,
 Obeisance to You ! 155
 Obeisance to You, our Dancer in Kuttraalam !
 Obeisance to You Oh King, Who appeared in Kokazhi !

Obeisance to You our Father in Eengoi hill !

Obeisance to You Oh beautiful One

of beauty abounding Pazhanam !

Obeisance to You Oh Vidangaa

Who abides in Kadamboor !

160*

Obeisance to You Father who bestows grace

on those who take refuge in You !

161

Obeisance to You, Oh King,

Who, under the *iththi* tree,

bestowed grace on the twice three

and the elephant !

162-163*

Obeisance to You Civan

Who own the Southern country !

Obeisance to You,

Oh God to people of every country !

165

Obeisance to You

Who bestowed grace on the litter of the sow ! 166*

160. 'Vidangaa' — Spontaneously appearing *lingam* — an amorphous symbol of the Godhead in stone — unsculpted by human hands.

162-163. i. '*iththi* tree' — the white fig tree, (*ficus infectoria*). This is different from *ficus dalhouseae*, the banyan tree, the *kal-aal* which also, according to the Tamil Lexicon. is called *iththi*. This *kal-aal* is the tree, seated under which Lord Civan as youthful Dakshinaamoorthy instructed the four hoary saints, Sanakar and others, in the mysteries of how to apprehend the Godhead.

162-163. ii. 'twice three' — six hand-maidens. Compare with lines 62, 63 of decad 2 and note thereto in Appendix III.

162-163. iii. 'and the elephant' — Once, the albinotic elephant, the mount of Indra, was cursed by Durvaasa Muzi to be born as a wild elephant on earth. In this state, it is said to have worshipped the Civalingam (an amorphous symbol in stone standing for God) and to have regained its original status.

166. Twelve mischievous lads who annoyed an ascetic were cursed by him to be born as a litter of pigs. While the mother sow was slain by a hunter, Lord Civan is said to have taken the form of the sow and to have suckled the litter.

Obeisance to You of renowned Kailai mountain !

Obeisance to You, Oh beautiful great One,

You should bestow grace on me !

Obeisance to You, Oh Lord who bestows grace
to the destruction of darkness in me !

169*

Obeisance to You ! I, lonely one, Your slave,
am wearied !

170

Obeisance to You !

Bestow grace on me that I may gain
stability (of mind) and contemplate on You.

Obeisance to You ! Say : ' Fear not ',

and here (and now) bestow grace on me !

Obeisance to You Who preferred the poison
as very ambrosia !

Obeisance to You, Oh Father !

Obeisance to You, Oh Sire !

Obeisance to You, Oh eternal One !

Obeisance to You, Oh Nimalaa !

175

Obeisance to You, Oh my Husband !

Obeisance to You, Oh Creator !

Obeisance to You great One !

Obeisance to You, Oh Lord !

Obeisance to You, Oh rare One !

Obeisance to You, Oh Amalaa !

Obeisance to You, Oh Guide

in the guise of a Brahmin !

Obeisance to You, Oh first One !

Is this just ?

I cannot endure (separation from You).

180

169. 'darkness' - the darkness of the *aanava malam*. See note to line 64 of decad 1.

Obeisance to You, Oh Kin !

Obeisance to You, Oh Life !

Obeisance to You, Oh Magnificence !

Obeisance to You, Oh Bliss !

Obeisance to You, Oh Cloud !

Obeisance to You, Oh Bridegroom !

Obeisance to You, Oh Partner of Her

with lovely feet touched up by the cotton swab
(dipped in red henna lotion) !

184

Obeisance to You !

I, cur of a slave, am in distress !

185

Obeisance to You, our radiant Eesaa !

Obeisance to You, Pupil of my eyes,

Who abide in Kavaiththalai !

Obeisance to You,

Oh King easy of access in Kuvaippathi !

Obeisance to You,

Oh Monarch possessing the mountainous country !

Obeisance to You of Arikesari noted for its art ! 190

Obeisance to You, Oh Wealth of Thirukkazhukkundru !

Obeisance to You,

Oh Haran abiding in Poovanam studded with hills !

Obeisance to You

Who are a formless One

and One with form as well !

Obeisance to You Oh grace surcharged Mountain !

Obeisance to You, Oh Flame

Who have transcended even the 'thuriyam' state! 195*

195. 'thuriyam' — the fourth state of consciousness—the first three being the waking, dreaming and deep sleep states. The state transcending the 'thuriyam' state may, perhaps, be compared to the state of contemplation which Thomas Merton describes as 'the step which is no step'. See page 77.

- Obeisance to You, Oh Clarity rare to be known !
 Obeisance to You, Oh Radiance of unpierced pearl !
 Obeisance to You loving One to those
 who have become Your henchmen !
 Obeisance to You, Oh unsatiating Ambrosia ! Oh Charity !
 Obeisance to You great One
 with a thousand names ! 200
 Obeisance to You with the garland
 of *thaali* and *aruhu* ! 201*
 Obeisance to You the Dancer
 Who became a tall pillar of effulgence !
 Obeisance to You handsome One
 with sandal wood paste (and holy ash on forehead) !
 Obeisance to You, Oh Bliss
 rare to be conceived by the mind !
 Obeisance to You Who abides in the great Mountain
 of Vedic fame ! 205*
 Obeisance to You Who take possession of us
 in order to redeem us !
 Obeisance to You Who gave in Your grace
 the teat of the tiger to an orphaned *pulvaai* ! 207*
 Obeisance to You Who walked on the surfy sea !
 Obeisance to You Who that day bestowed grace
 on the blackbird !
 Obeisance to the Lord Who wills the desires
 of my (five) mighty senses to shrivel ! 216*

201. '*thaali*' — hedge bind-weed (*Ipomoea Sepiaria*), a kind of creeper; '*arugu*' — hariali grass, *Cynoden dactylon*, a variety of creeper grass used in worship of Civan and Ganapathi. Modern medical researchers claim many therapeutic virtues for it.

205. compare with lines 100-102 of decad 2.

207 '*pulvaai*' — a category of deer.

- Obeisance to You Who appear in many forms on earth !
 Obeisance to You Who are the beginning,
 the middle and the end !
 Obeisance to You Who, not letting the Paandiyan
 enter hell or heaven, or come back again
 into this world of four divisions, 213*
 graciously bestowed on Him the transcendental state ;
 Obeisance to You Who permeate everything
 without exception ! 215
 Obeisance to You King of Civapuram
 of luxuriant blossom ! 216*
 Obeisance to the God with a *Kazhuneer* garland ! 217*
 Obeisance to You Who dispel
 the delusion of those who worship You !
 Obeisance to You ! Graciously accept this garland
 of words strung by this cur
 who does not know either right or wrong. 220
 Obeisance to You ancient One who burnt down many cities !
 Obeisance to You, Oh infinitely infinite effulgent Infinity !
 Obeisance, Obeisance to You,
 Oh Lord adorned with snakes !
 Obeisance, Obeisance to You Oh Ancient Cause !
 Obeisance, Obeisance to You !
 Victory, Victory, Obeisance to You ! 225

Thiruchchitrambalam

213. 'this world with four divisions'—In Tamil literature, the world is divided into mountainous country (*Kurunji*), forest land (*mullai*), the fertile plains (*marutham*) and coastland (*neithal*).

216. 'Civapuram ... blossom'—the human body and the heart.

217. 'Kazhuneer'—purple water lily, *nymphaea odorata*.

5. THE THIRUCHCHATHAKAM

Bhakthi Vairaagya Vichiththiram

(Sung at Thirupperunthurai.)

Thiruchchathakam means the Sacred Hundred. There are 100 stanzas in this decad. The place and purport of this decad have been explained on pages 31 to 36 of this book. This decad is divided, as stated before, into ten sub-decads of ten stanzas each.

The sub-title to this decad is *bhakthi-vairaagya-vichiththiram*, the marvel of devotion and one-pointed tenacity of purpose. The reader will easily appreciate the appropriateness of this sub-title when he studies the hundred stanzas. One can apprehend the Godhead only by unstinting and undying love and tenacity of purpose. This is the teaching of this decad, in fact, of the entire *Thiruvaachakam*.

The Sub-decads

Thiruchchitrambalam

i. Discrimination of The Real

(The first and second stanzas disclose the appropriateness of this title)

With body prickling and quivering,
with palms joined over my head (in obeisance)
to your anklet-girt fragrance-laden feet,
with tears brimming, heart aglow,
and the unreal forsaken, never shall I lapse
from the observance of singing : " Obeisance to You,
Victory, Victory, Obeisance to You ! "
Oh my Owner, do acknowledge me (as your slave). - 1

Accept I shall not,
 the status of Indra, Vishnu or Brahmaa :
 Even if my family (repute) were to be ruined,
 associate I shall not,
 unless it be with Your devotees :
 Even were I to enter hell (therefor),
 despise it I shall not,
 provided I am left with Your holy grace :
 Think I shall not, Oh Lord,
 of any other god but You, Oh our noblest One ! 2*

Ever thinking only of the feet of the noblest One —
 my Father, my Owner — and melting (with ecstasy),
 with my mind so enrapt that people say :
 “ this man is fuddled ”,
 and, in that state of mind,
 saying whatever whatever befits that state,
 and wandering from urb to urb
 with everyone speaking whatever whatever,
 comes to his mind,
 when indeed, am I to die, thus, to myself ? 3*

Our Kinsmen who, once upon a time, fearing to die
 as a penalty for eating the flesh
 of Thakkan's sacrificial ram,
 and (on another occasion) fearing the poison,
 entreated You crying “ Ah, Ah, Our Father ! ”,
 those same, thinking themselves as forming a Trinity
 along with our Lord,
 rule the heavens

2. ‘ provided holy grace ’ — some would render this as
 ‘ provided it is Your divine will ’.

3. ‘ urb ’ — Latin word for town, city.

and haughtily strut about on earth as gods.
What a sin this is !

4*

Thavam I did not perform ;
cool flowers I did not strew (on Your feet)
and unintermittingly worship You.
I, of futile birth and of rare (evil) Karma,
have not gained the good fortune
of receiving the bliss
which is found in (the minds of) Your adorers :
Graciously grant me, Your slave, only such birth
as will lead me to Your holy feet,
Oh our transcendently transcendent One !

5*

Oh Thief, Who, however, does not stay hidden
from the minds of those devotees
who believe that they can gain for themselves
all that they beg for,
by going (to shrines) far and wide
and showering many choice flowers on your feet
and unintermittingly adoring them only !
Do everlastingly grant me, in Your grace,
love to Your far-reaching anklet-girt feet
to totally adore You.

6*

4. *Devaas* are only mortals exalted to that state by virtue of their good Karma. See lines 26 to 31 of decad 1. *Maanikkavaachakar* includes *Brahmaa* and *Vishnu* too, who are held as members of the Trinity, among the *devaas*.

5. *Thavam* has no single equivalent in English. It comprises charity in the heart, austerities, self-mortification, non-attachment, meditation, and contemplation.

6. i. 'Thief' — thief of my heart. St. Thirugnaanasambandar too sang : ' Oh Thief Who has stolen my heart '.

When he, who created him
 who created the whole universe,
 once, with lowered head, searched everywhere,
 bearing luscious flowers,
 Our Lord, Who was then a farther One to him,
 now a hereabout One,
 dances with ghouls
 in the cremation ground,
 and, wearing the skin of the tiger,
 and overcome with mad joy,
 wanders about as a vagrant.

7*

The blowing wind, fire and water
 along with the earth and the ether,
 their hour of obliteration,
 at what hour will it come?

Oh Father with feet which keep dancing
 after that hour had come (and passed) !
 Oh Lord Who becomes Time for the riddance
 of the potent karmic deeds done by me,
 And Who, thwarting them, saves me !

8

Bhavan, my Lord,
 Wearer of the famed cool moon as chaplet,
 Lord of the heaven-dwellers,
 Civan, my Lord, He assumed lordship over me
 even after seeing my meanness.
 Ev'n Him (for me) to claim as my Lord,

6. ii. 'far-reaching feet' — feet that reach right down to the seven nether regions. Compare with stanza 10 of decad 7.

7. i. 'him who created him who ... the universe' — Vishnu; Brahmaa, the creator of everything, was born from the navel of Vishnu.

7. ii. 'with lowered head' — Vishnu in the guise of a boar.

and I to claim as His slave,
 this very relationship,
 Bhuvan shall relate
 as the manner of recognising my Lord.

9*

Not worthy am I
 to enter in the midst of Your devotees,
 Oh my uncut Gem !
 Worthy of You, of course,
 is the manner by which You enslaved me.
 The lowly ones, howsoever lowly,
 very high, indeed, You raise ;
 the heaven-dwellers You abase.
 Oh my Father, Oh Ambrosia,
 laughable, indeed, Oh my Lord,
 is the farce You have acted with me !

10

ii. Acquainting God of One's Aspirations.

(The Commentators explain the title of this sub-decad—*Arrivurruththal*—as ‘instructing one’s heart in its duties’. Apparently, this explanation arises from the fact that the last two stanzas of this sub-decad are addressed to the heart; but when one takes into account the other eight stanzas which are addressed to God, the appropriateness of my rendering of the title will be evident.

9 i. ‘Bhavan’—an epithet for God, meaning ‘Cause for the appearance of the world’.

9. ii. ‘Bhuvan’—contraction of the word ‘bhuvanam’—the world.

The Sub-decad

In pretence, imitating Your devotees,
 through their midst,
 to enter the land of deliverance,
 I rush in a great hurry :
 Oh splendid gem-set golden Hill !
 Unintermitting love unto You
 to take root in the core of my heart and melt it,
 do graciously grant me, Oh my Owner !

11

Not the least whit shall I fear to be born ;
 what can I do about dying ?
 Even the heavens, if I were to get,
 I would not want it :
 Kingship over the world,
 I had never thought highly of.
 Oh honey-filled *Kondrai* flower-decked Civan !
 Our Lord ! our Father !
 The day of receiving Your grace
 I shall yearn for, crying : " When ? when ? ".

12*

Yearn shall I, cur of a slave,
 Your blossom, feet to see.
 Patiently, the goodly flowers
 I do not string for You ;
 praise You, till my tongue gets calloused, I do not.
 Oh You who bent the golden bow well befitting You
 The ambrosia of grace if You do not bestow on me,
 grieve shall I, extremely forlorn one ;
 how else am I to be redeemed ?

13

To become fit for Your sacred feet,
 my heart does not turn to pulp,
 I do not melt with love,
 I do not adore you,
 adorning you with garlands of flowers.
 Your praises, I do not speak ;
 Oh God of the gods ! Your holy temple,
 I do not sweep or wash, nor do I dance :
 On the road to (spiritual) death I am hurrying,
 I who aim to reach You by my wits.

14

Becoming the heavens and the earth,
 becoming the wind and the light,
 becoming flesh and life as well,
 becoming being and not being,
 becoming the King, and the Manipulator
 of those (puppets) who speak of I and mine,
 You, Who are all these,
 with what words shall I laud ?

15

The heavenly ones extol You
 that they may prosper ;
 they stoop their minds unto You
 that they may rise high,
 and that all should worship them.
 Oh You adorned with a garland
 surrounded by humming bees !
 This cur of a slave too,
 with the aim of severing
 (this chain of) futile births, extols You.

16

The heavenly ones who extol (You),
 the four Vedaas which sing (Your glory),

the lovely Dame with *kuravu* flower-decked tresses
 Who has one side of You as Her share,
 and devotees who, in their true love for You,
 have lost themselves in You with delight,
 would all of them more and more behold
 Your anklet-gripping far-reaching feet,
 Oh rare One ?

17*

Oh rare One to everybody !
 Oh Pervader of the ether !
 Oh great One on the stage (of my heart) !
 I do not strew fragrance laden flowers
 on the dazzling anklet-girt feet which enslaved me ;
 neither do I cry in amazement
 nor melt in adoration.
 I cannot tarry (in this world).
 What is to become of me ?
 Perish I will, I will perish.

18

Oh my worthless heart which palpitates and melts
 to the flowery dart of spring-time cupid
 and to women with pearly teeth, rosy lips
 and blue lotus-like eyes !
 He, who entered you,
 and, being established in you,
 enslaved you while all your flesh melted,
 behold, He has left you today and is in heaven ;
 yet you live without dying !

19

17. i. '*kuravu*' - bottle flower, *webera corymbosa*.

17. ii. The question is taken as expressing a doubt, but, perhaps it is better to take the question to mean, "Would they behold Your feet while I alone languish here ?"

Yet you live, Oh my heart
 who does not (really) live;
 caught in potent karma,
 you sink.

Without praying to Him
 Who saves You from sinking,
 you are seeking your own ruin.
 I have been telling you repeatedly,
 you are falling into the flood-tide
 of the sea of sorrow.

20

iii. Abandoning Demonstrative Method of Knowing

There are two ways of knowing or looking at the world. One method is the all too common one of knowing things as separate entities, such as tree, dog, cat, man, rock etc. The other method is that of the enlightened ones who see God alone in all things. God, however, cannot be conceived in His entirety unless (the demonstrative method of knowing is abandoned.) The unknown author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*, therefore, said :

“Similarly, just as it would be an improper thing, and a handicap, for a man engaged in meditation to consider his ‘exterior works’—what he had done or ought to do, however holy those works might be, so surely it is just as much improper and a handicap for a man who ought to be working in divine darkness, and in this cloud of unknowing, whose love is moving out to God Himself, to allow any thought or meditation of God’s wonderful gifts, or kindness,

or any of his created works, (italics ours), physical or spiritual, to obtrude itself between him and his God—however pleasant or inspiring those thoughts may be. It is for this reason that I say that you are to suppress these invidious thoughts, and cover them up with a thick cloud of forgetting, even when they are holy and promise well to achieve your object. Why, love may reach up to God himself even in this life—but not knowledge. ”

In the case of the previous two sub-decads, it was easy to understand from the trend of several stanzas in those decads why the respective sub-titles were given to them. But in this sub-decad, we have to search diligently for the appropriateness of the title. We can find it only in such phrases as,

- (a) “ becoming a heart from the sole of the foot to the vertex ” (20),
- (b) “ If one speaks at all, speaking ever and anon such words as “Eesan, my Father, Lord of my father ” (24),

and in the 26th stanza in its entirety.

The Sub-decad

While those, who on hearing the words,

“ Oh You with flooding Ganga
reposing in Your matted locks !
Oh You on the bull !
Oh Lord of the heavenly ones ! ”

stood by melting
 with thirsting heart,
 all topsy turvy and deeply agitated
 like water rushing into a gorge,
 since I, becoming all heart from sole to scalp,
 do not melt

in the presence of You,
 Who enslaved me in preference to them,
 and, with my whole body turned into eyes,
 Oh my Father,
 a very flood of tears does not rush forth,
 my heart is a stone,
 and eyes of me of evil karma are tree-knots. 21

For the sake of You Who, entering
 and abiding in me steeped in karma,
 and, as if You would say:
 "Come, I am Destroyer of Karma",
 announced Yourself as "I am so and so"
 and enslaved me and became my Lord,
 since iron statue-like I do not sing or dance,
 and, alas, do not wail

or wither or of all spirit get drained off,
 Oh Primeval One,
 what I have become, is it just?
 I know not the end of all this,
 Oh You Who are the beginning and end (of all things)! 22
 That You, indeed, are the Lord
 of the four-fold Vedaas, I realise,

21. 'tree-knots' — readers may be familiar with knots found on trunks or wooden planks. They would have noticed that they resemble eyes. They are therefore known in Tamil as 'wooden eyes'.

and I, the lowliest of all, a very cur,
this too I see ;

Yet, since I say :

“ Oh Naathan, I have become a devotee to You ”,
therefore, You enslaved me.

Devotees are there not,
other than this vagrant wretch ?
Is this not verily Your greatness ?

Oh mighty Lord,
in what words shall I speak (of Your greatness)? 23*

Oh You Who assumed lordship over those
who, if they spoke at all, spoke and spoke nothing but
“ Eesan ! Oh my Father !

“ Oh great Lord of my forefathers ! ”,
who, if they applied anything at all
(on their bodies)

applied only the sacred ash in abundance,
and who, crying : “ Obeisance to You our Lord ! ”,
had passed beyond birth and death
through unswerving love !

Alas for the manner in which You enslaved
this flood-of-desire-ridden crook,

Oh flawless Hill of Gems ! Oh my Father ! 24

Oh my Father, Whom the concourse of heaven-dwellers,
saying : “ His colour is not rosy, pale it is not ;
“ many is He, nay, One is He ;
atom is He, nay, tinier than atom is He ” ;
and thus blundering in their thoughts,

23. ‘ Naathan ’ – this is different from the word ‘ Naadhan ’ appearing
in the 1st line of decad 1, and means Master, Lord or Husband.

could not find the way to reach !
 Your colour as it is showing me,
 Your form showing me,
 Your blossom anklet-girt feet,
 the very same, showing me,
 positively preventing this lost soul
 from being born again, You enslaved me ;
 Oh my mighty Lord, what shall I say or think ? 25
 Appropriating my thoughts to Your own Self ;
 appropriating this cur's twin eyes
 to Your holy blossom feet ;
 appropriating my prayers too for the same blossom,
 and appropriating my speech for precious words
 about You, Oh Mountain,
 Oh marvellously adroit covetable great sea
 of Ambrosia,
 Who came and, enslaving me, entered into me,
 to the delight of my five senses,
 You offered Yourself to me—
 a forlorn creature,
 without both (spiritual learning and experience)—
 Oh unique Flame with hue
 like a very forest of red lotuses ! 26*

26. i. 'You offered Yourself' ~ meaning to say, "alas, neither did I realise my good fortune nor did I take advantage of the offer".

26. ii. The words "forlorn creature without both, i. e., learning and experience", lead one to think that Maanikkavaachakar is referring to the occasion when he first met the Lord under the *kurunda* tree in Perunthurai. He did not qualify then for immediate acceptance by and merging in the Lord. He was, therefore, asked to stay behind while all the other devotees went away with the Lord. (See lines 127 to 129 of decad 2).

To forlorn cussed me, —

who, tossed about by the huge cruel waves

of the great sea of births,

destitute of any hold,

spun about by the wind called women with red lips

resembling the *kovvai* fruit

and caught in the jaws of the great shark of lust,

was thinking and thinking of

how now to escape from all this,

and lay grasping the raft called the Five Letters —

Oh primeval One, **You showed**

the beginningless and endless lush shore

(of the land of deliverance) and enslaved me.

27*

By hearsay knowledge, not known by any-one is He ;

decline He has none ; no relatives has He ;

He hears everything without need to listen.

Even while the citizens were wide awake,

providing this cur of all persons in the world with a seat,

showing to this very cur

everything never before shown,

and enabling me to hear

what has never before been heard,

He prevented me from being born again,

and enslaved me.

A marvellous deed, indeed, is this done by my Lord ! 28

If we inquire into it,

is there a marvellous deed akin to this

27. 'Kovvai'—a creeper, a kind of Bryonia, whose fruit, when ripe, is of a deep red colour.

which my Father —

Who is male, female and neuter too,
 Who is the ether and is, moreover,
 the vast pillar of fire,
 Who stands on the farside as the end (of everything)
Civan of hue like the large red *vetchi* flower,
Our Lord, King of the devaas, did ?

Making me a slave
 unto His most beloved devotees,
 and ridding me of all fear,
 He thawed my heart, and entered it,
 making ambrosia well up in it,
 and, making love wax in me, enslaved me. 29

Deva-devan Whom the King of the devaas (Indraa)
 does not know,

He who creates, protects
 and destroys the verdant worlds,
 the primeval One

Who stands as the King of the Trinity,
 the Image (of all things),

Father of my forefathers,
 my Father with one part (of His body)
 lorded over by a Dàme !

everyone's Monarch,

He came and enslaved me !

We are no one's subject ! Nothing we fear !

We have joined the slaves of His slaves !

Let us dive deeper and deeper (in the pool of bliss)
 and sport about !

iv. Purification of the Soul

Aldous Huxley says that the nature of Reality is such that it cannot be directly and immediately apprehended except by those who have chosen to fulfil certain conditions — making themselves loving, pure in heart and poor in spirit. This sub-decad deals with the disciplines which have to be followed for gaining purity of heart, or of the soul as stated here, Mahaa-mahaupaadyaaya Pandithamani Kathiresan Chettiar, who has written a special and remarkable commentary to *Thiruchchathakam*, says that the first five stanzas of this sub-decad detail the steps to be taken to gain purity of the soul and that the next five relate the distress which Maanikkavaachakar feels when he finds himself slipping back from the proximity to the Godhead gained by such disciplines, due to the revival of the old attachment to I and mine. When we, however study the first five stanzas of this sub-decad, we find that they are accusations levelled at one's heart for failing to do certain things incumbent on it. We should, I presume, take it that Maanikkavaachakar adopts this negative, but very forceful, manner of telling his heart — and us too — what disciplines should be observed for gaining purity of the soul.

It will not be inappropriate to consider this sub-decad as a dissertation on the 9th verse of *Civa-gnaana-bhodham*, the purport of which, it is said, is to indicate the way in which the soul is purified. This is the verse :

“ Seek in your meditation with the eyes of gnosis
the Lord whom corporeal eyes

and worldly knowledge cannot see.
 On the worldly knowledge making room,
 like the lifting of a mirage of a swift chariot
 on which no one rides,
 the Lord will become cool shade to you.
 (To consolidate that experience),
 meditate on the mystic five letters
 in the prescribed manner”

The Sub-decad

Dance You do not ;
 to the Dancer's anklet-girt feet,
 love you have not ;
 with bones melting, sing you do not ;
 nor do you feel distressed ;
 bow down you do not ;
 the blossom feet of the Lord
 you do not deck your head with ;
 nor do you deck those feet with flowers ;
 Oh succourless carcass of a heart,
 you seek Him not in street after street ;
 wail you do not ;
 I do not know what to do with you !

31

Though you had received much sweet grace
 to prevent you parting from my Father—
 Him who severs the bonds,
 Him, Who, entering and enslaving wisdom-lacking me,
 bestowed wisdom in His grace,
 and made known all the ways
 (to the Kingdom of Heaven)—
 yet you are perverse,

Oh my carcass of a heart !

You have so debased me

that all wile in me has increased !

You have served me ill to my utter ruination !

32

Oh witless foolish heart,

who, turning a traitor, is bent on ruining me,

no longer shall I trust you confidently !

Even though you saw the sacred ash

stand out on Civan's hefty shoulders,

you did not thaw ;

this body you did not tear to pieces ;

to be ruined is your nature ;

I cannot bear even to hear about you.

33

Oh my mind with potent desires, you will be ruined !

Oh you who survive after having parted

from the fragrant blossom-like foot—

an unmatured tender leaf blade—

of my Owner

Who has the right to exercise fully

His sway over me

even to selling this cur of a slave !

Oh you who have, moreover, lost

all you had experienced (of Him so far),

I can assess neither your wisdom

nor your pride in it.

34

Though you had sensed our Lord —

Who is impossible of appraisalment

by the heaven dwellers,

but easy of access to His devotees—

extirpate our wiles

and abide in us and enslave us,
and though this has seeped into your mind
yet, Oh my heart, you did not make of yourself
a great shrine (for Him)
by hating all that are (obstacles to it),
and by thinking about your self-interest.
You did not extirpate your foibles
and bow down at the feet of our Owner
in order to gain the transcendent goal.

35*

If there is to be no falling off
(of bonds of attachment)
that I may enter the golden city
which can be entered into but not got out of,
and if to the anklet-girt feet of my Father —
my Lord, He who enslaved me —
I am not to melt with love,
and if ambrosia with honey, milk and sugar-candy
is not to increase day to day,
what can I, karma ridden one, do for this?

36

Who else is there who has karma like me?
This lowly cur, to part from,
by even the least part (of the length)
of a millet seed,
is not the divine will of my Owner.
It being so, though separated from the goodly flower,
the foot of the primal One,
my head I smash not or split;
iron is the imagination of such a one as me;
stone is the mind;
and I do not know what the ear is.

37

Though all the rest had reached Him—
 the what-it-is I-know-not Honey, cow's Ghee,
 sugar-cane Juice, Civapuram's King,
 the Partner of Her with glances like a fawn's—
 I have not drawn near Him since a long time :
 I abide in the flesh and cherish it,
 I will be ruined :
 Will not my breath cease ?

38*

Rest they have none, beyond comparison they are ,
 those blossom feet ; He bestowed them on me,
 and showed the good path to me
 lowlier than the genus of dogs ;
 that Chief who bestowed on me
 such more than motherly sweet grace,
 I have not seen much (these days) ;
 yet in the fire I do not fall,
 from granite cliff I do not roll down ;
 will I plunge into the sea ?

39

Unmindful of the spring-time Cupid's (flowery) dart
 piercing me
 and the (cool) moon scorching (the wound),
 I, becoming whipped up,
 like curd agitated by a churn,
 by the wiles of women with glances like a fawn's,
 would not go forward to enter the city of my Civan
 Who bestowed on me honeyed holy grace ;
 but still exist dining and dressing well
 in order to preserve life in the flesh.

40

v. Rendering a Fit Return for Grace Received

The late Sri K. Subramania Pillai—lovingly called ‘M. L.’ Pillai—probably the first scholar to venture to write a commentary to *The Thiruvaachakam* in the 20th Century, has only one short sentence to say of this title. He says: “This sub-decad, probably, refers to the saint’s inability to render a fit return”. Mahaamahaa-upaadhiyaayaa Pandithamani Kadiresan Chettiaar comes to the same conclusion in a note of two pages. Sri S. Dhandapaani Dhesikar of Thirvaavaduthurai Mutt, however, gives a positive interpretation and says that, since a man can give only that which is his own, and since Maanikkavaachakar’s body and soul and possessions as well have been taken over by the Lord, he can give his love only which is yet his.

The ten stanzas, however, of this sub-decad harp on the saint’s lack of gratitude for the immeasurable and undeserved grace showered on him by God. Therefore, the title has, probably, to be taken to mean: “Let alone the question of rendering a fit return, of which no human being is capable, I am not even grateful for the grace received”

The Sub-decad

Living (gluttonously) like an elephant
with (not one but) two trunks,
I have not seen the Embryo in my mind ;
I have seen misery only.
“Come”, you commanded me,
Oh unique Lord of the heaven-dwellers !

Incapable am I (of rendering any return for this) ;
capable am I of eating only. 41*

To all who realise
that there is an Effulgent Being,
You are not possible of being known (by them)
whether You are female or male or neuter :
To me, Your servitor, You came and appeared
just exactly as You are :
Even after seeing this, I was blind ;
alas ! what trickery of the eye is this ? 42

Oh Form which even the top-ranking heavenly ones
do not know ! Oh Dancer who enslaved me !
Oh Earth, Oh Sky, Oh Time in which these come and go !
When indeed am I to see You ? 43

Oh transcendent One Who can (yet) be seen !
Oh luminous One beyond one's eye's vision !
Here like a fledgling, I, a wastrel,
do not know how to leave this deluding body
And embrace You :
I keep pampering the senses. 44

I do not call upon You with great potent love,
crying : " Obeisance to You ",
or rolling (on the ground),
or standing and praising You.
My code of conduct
seems to be like that of the Lord of death

41. i. ' an elephant with two trunks ' — An elephant is in the habit of ceaselessly shoving food into its mouth with its single trunk. How much more would an elephant eat if it had two trunks !

41. ii. ' Embryo ' — here refers to God ; see line 42 of decad 4.

Who, advancing against You,
had to feel the sting of Your lotus feet. 45*

Would He hail me too
as He does His other devotees,
and take me into His service,
He my Father, with *kondrai* flowers
from which honey and bees are never absent,
He Who is in the middle, bottom, top
and every particle (of every thing)
like gingili seed and its oil? 46

My Father and Mother, my Lord,
and, moreover, to every one,
Father and Mother and their Lord,
but Who has none of these for Himself,
He entered into me long ago—
He, the Treasure,
rare of being known
by even the mind by any one. 47

Even after beholding the boundless anklet-girt feet
of the Being rare to be seen by anyone—
without any invidious distinction of rich or poor,
heavenly ones or the worm —
I parted from Him ;
Oh the misery, I, stony-minded one, suffer ! 48

45. 'Like...death' — refers to the occasion when Yamaa — the Lord of Death—came to take the life of Maarkandeyaa, a boy of 16 years, while he was worshipping a *lingam*, the amorphous symbol for Civan, with flowers. The boy clung to the *lingam* in terror, and Civan appeared out of the *lingam* and bade Yamaa to desist ; but he persisted ; therefore, Civan kicked him out of the *sanctum sanctorum* and conferred on Maarkandeyaa the boon of being eternally sixteen.

Severing the bonds (of paasam) and enslaving me,
 You elevated me, You elevated me —
 who did not know what eight and two make —
 to the rostrum (of doctrinal polemics)
 along with Your devotees
 smeared with eye-delighting sacred ash,
 while all looked on (in staring unbelief).

49*

Oh Wise One ! Oh Ambrosia !

This cur of of a slave,

Did You take for a wise person
 and enslaved me ?

Lack of wisdom,

You found out that very day

when You enslaved me.

Wise person or not, do bestow grace, Oh Eesan !

50

vi. Purification of Experience

In this decad, Maanickkavachakar harps on shedding his body. He feels along with Thiruvalluvar that even the body is too much for those who are engaged in severing the chain of births, i. e., in apprehending the Godhead. He wants to beat down under the "Cloud of Forgetting" everything relating to the body and the world and the experiences arising therefrom

49. "me who did not know what eight and two make"—commentators, feeling themselves under an obligation to see a mystic meaning in these words, have laboured hard, but not very convincingly to even themselves to make out that this phrase means the *pranavaa* i. e., Om. They have themselves suggested in the same breath that the phrase probably means no more than "an ignoramus who cannot even add eight and two".

so that he is in a state of absolute purity fit for receiving the experience par excellence — the Lord making a tabernacle of his body.

The Sub-decad

Oh Eesan, my own Lord and Lord of us all,
Mighty Lord of My Father,
Destroyer of my birth,
You have seen that I do not think of You
Who enslaved me —
a wretch of a vile cur
of no significance whatsoever.
Oh Effulgence, Oh Dweller on the stage (of my heart),
I do not know what to do. 51

What to do, I, a mean cur, do not know ;
I deserve to get all of what the false ones—
who have not beheld your golden feet blossom—
deserve to get.
Though I have seen and heard of
the falsehood-free true ones
reaching Your fragrant blossom feet,
I false one, remain here
dining and dressing well,
Oh Lion in battle ! 52

Oh Lion in battle (against the *aanava malam*) !
Even after seeing Your eminent esteemed devotees
who have received Your grace reach Your feet,
on Your coming out of the gates of Your golden city
along with Her of tightly laced tender breasts,
and ridding them of the darkness (of *aanava malam*),

would I (alone) wallow here

like a blind village bull ?

Would that the life of wicked me withers away ! 53.

While many great ascetics,

performing *thavam* for interminable time,

and torturing their bodies to have a vision of You,

stood by sorely despondent,

You took this sinner under Your service.

Yet, I would not destroy this filth-incarnate body.

Oh my Gem ! I am devoid of aching love to see You.

Taking hold of what shall I be redeemed,

Oh my Lord ? 54.

Oh Partner of Umaa of fawn-like glance !

Oh Honey Who came here (on earth) and enslaved me !

Oh Ambrosia ! Oh Essence of the sugar-cane !

Oh Civan ! Oh King of Thillai in the south !

While those who fall in line with Your divine will

merge in Your anklet-girt feet,

I continue to remain here guarding

this fleshy nest of worms, Oh my Owner ! 55.

Oh my Owner, though I have seen devotees —

possessors of heart-melting great love to You, their Owner—

reach your feet by contemplating on You,

yet I, worse than a pye-dog,

do not melt in my heart,

but am stony minded and dry-eyed.

Have you decided that I should remain here

guarding this foul-smelling nest of worms ? 56.

The way You have decided in my case, well befits me ;

fitting too is your formerly catching hold of devotees
lest they grow weary.

In spite of knowing all this,

I furtive one,

aware only of the smile

twitching on the lips of a woman,

and of her mantle slipping down a little,

and of the sweat beading on her face,

have conspired my own ruin.

57

If, looking at You —

the Honey, the Milk, the Essence of the sugar-cane,

the Effulgence,

the Owner who melts the flesh of those who trust Him,

the Celestial One —

I, a wastrel, were to say,

“ I am Your slave, You enslaved me ”,

my behaviour will be such,

that You too, laughing (at my impudence),

would show grace to this slave.

58

Oh Chief Whose nature is not known by others !

Having enslaved this wile wicked cur,

Oh Sire, will You let me go outside (Your pale) ?

Who will look after me ?

What will I do, my Lord ?

Oh my Father with holy form shining like gold,

where shall I enter (and take refuge) ?

59

Enter shall I (into your presence) !

Mine alone are Your feet !

Standing in the midst of devotees who adore You,

laugh shall I,

staring at your since long familiar shoulders,
shameless cur as I am.

Melting love I do not have to see You.

Am I, lowly one, fit for You to enslave ?

My nature, alas, my Father,

I cannot endure.

60:

vii. Pleading for Divine Compassion

The appropriateness of the title to this sub-decad will be evident from its various stanzas.

The Sub-decad

Endure I cannot, this bodily life,

Oh Sankara, obeisance to You !

Oh our mighty One, obeisance to You !

Oh peerless unique One, obeisance to You !

Oh the heavenly ones' Lord, obeisance to You !

Oh Thillai's Dancer, obeisance to You !

Oh our Ninmalaa, obeisance to You, obeisance to You ! 61

Obeisance to You, Oh Namachchivaaya !

Oh Bhujangaa, I am confused !

Obeisance to You, Oh Namachchivaaya !

Refuge other (than You) have I none !

Obeisance to You, Oh Namachchivaaya !

See that you do not drive me outside Your pale !

Obeisance to You, Oh Namachchivaaya !

Victory, Victory (to You) ! Obeisance to You ! 62*

Obeisance to the munificent One

Who enslaves even false ones like me !

Obeisance to Your feet, obeisance !

62. 'Bhujangaa': the God adorned with snakes.

Oh my Lord, obeisance, obeisance to You !
 Obeisance to Your freshet
 of new honey-like grace,
 Oh God Who is the earth, water, fire, air,
 master of *yangyaas*, the ether
 and the two orbs of light !

63*

Oh God, obeisance to You !
 Do graciously acknowledge me,
 Obeisance to You !
 To make me renounce the world,
 You should melt my heart and enslave me ;
 Obeisance to you !
 Oh Sankara Who keeps the Ganga in Your matted locks !
 Obeisance, Obeisance to You !

64

Sankara, Obeisance to You !
 Other refuge have I none, obeisance to You
 Oh You Who have as one part of You
 the Dame of angry snake's hood-like under belly,
 red lips, pearly teeth
 and black lustrous eyes,
 obeisance to You !
 Oh Rider on Vishnu turned into a bull,
 obeisance to You !
 No longer can I lead my life here,
 Oh my Lord, I despise it.

65

I have degraded myself,
 Oh my Lord ! Obeisance to You ! Obeisance to You !
 Blame You I do not,

63. i. master of *yangyaas* (- see note to line 36 of decad 1.

63. ii. ' two orbs of light ' — the sun and the moon.

Oh Foot Which has mastery over me ; obeisance to You !

Offences all to bear,

is the duty of elders ; obeisance to You !

Rid for me this (kind of) life ; obeisance to You,

Oh Lord of the land of the heavenly ones ! 66

Our Lord, obeisance to You !

Oh Lion to each and each of the heavenly ones,

obeisance to You !

Oh Part of the Dame with flower-stalk-like waist,

Oh white ash smeared One,

obeisance to You !

Oh my fair Lord, obeisance to You !

Oh Lord on the dance hall in Thillai,

Obeisance to You !

Oh Lord of the world on high, obeisance to You !

Oh unique One Who has me as his slave,

obeisance to You ! 67

Oh unique One, obeisance to You !

Oh peerless Father, obeisance to You !

Oh *Guru* to the heavenly ones, obeisance to You !

Oh our soft tender Shoot, obeisance to You !

Bidding me " come unto me ",

You should draw me unto You, obeisance to You !

Bestow on me Your feet,

ending loneliness of forlorn me ;

obeisance to You ! 68

Oh You Who love Your utterly loving devotees,

more than they love You !

Obeisance to You !

Oh magnificent One

Who, extirpating my falsity and enslaving me,

bestows grace,
 Obeisance to You !
 Oh munificent One
 Who, swallowing the gushing poison,
 gave ambrosia to the heavenly ones,
 obeisance to You !
 Your all-pervading feet, on this cur,
 You should bestow in Your grace, obeisance to You ! 69
 Obeisance to You who became the earth,
 water, fire, wind and ether !
 Obeisance to You
 Who, becoming beginning to all beings,
 have no beginning for Yourself !
 Obeisance to You
 Who, becoming the end to all beings,
 have no end for Yourself !
 Obeisance to You Who intermingle in the five senses,
 without them intermingling in You ! 70

viii. Steeped in Bliss

As stated on page 32 this and the next two sub-decads describe "the assurance of a comforting mighty presence which grows on one more and more until one realises that it is God revealing himself in a light that is painful to one's nature and all its faculties, because it is infinitely above them and because ~~ye~~ purity is at war with your own selfishness and darkness and imperfection". Studious readers can easily see in the stanzas which follow, "the assurance of a comforting presence which grows on one more and more" as well as the painfulness of such growing assurance to one's nature.

The sub-decad

Oh my Father, deeming me mature
 for union with You,
 You enslaved me and looked at me,
inviting me to unite with You,
but now that it is clear
 that there is to be no union between You and me,
what did Your look mean?
 Whether I am to have union with You or not,
 let love unto Your anklet-girt feet
 unite me with You,
 in supreme bliss,
 Oh beautiful eyed One !

71*

Seeking bliss, I did not seek
 the pleasures of Indraa and others ;
 Oh only One,
 Oh my Lord and Lord of us all,
 without Your twin feet, I cannot live.
 May my body quake and split open,
 may my hands in adoration
 go up to my head, and may the tears of my eyes
 swell into a river, Oh my Sire !

72

Oh Sire, other than You,
 I, wily one, have no support ;
 otherwise than adulterated with falsehood,
 I, false one, am not, Oh my Lord and Lord of us all !
 Oh Partner of Her with collyrium applied eyes,
 may the love of the true devotees

71. The first four lines refer to lines 21, 22 of decad 1, the next three lines refer to lines 127 to 129 of decad 2.✓

who have come unto You
and merged in Your anklet-girt feet
happen in me also. 73

It is love I need unto Your anklet-girt feet,
Oh Truth incarnate !
Extirpating falsehood in me, and enslaving me,
graciously say to this cur : " Come unto me "
May I too, assuming (slavery),
and paying obeisance to You for ever and ever,
die and die again and come and come again,
Oh King, to adore You. 74*

The earth and the heavens adore You,
and the Vedaas four wailing (loud)
keep panting to reach You,
as there is no other Truth but You.
Since we too, adoring You cry : " We won't leave You ",
why do You, Partner of Her with close-set breasts,
hesitate to come forward and abide in us
and bestow grace on us ? 75

Whereas the mind, attempting to comprehend You,
comes up against its limitations,
by speech, not the least whit is possible.

74. Compare with :

If one but can behold the arched brow,
the budding smile on the *kovvai* red lips,
the moist matted locks,
the milk white ash on the coral hued body
and the sweetness endowed
raised golden foot (of Civan),
even human birth
is desirable in this vast world.

St. Thirunaavukkarasar.

What is spoken (about You) is only hearsay.

You Who are the entire universe,
the five senses cannot perceive.

What kind of a thing, what kind of a thing is it,
and where is it, my Father's foot?

Tell me, that I may gain it. 76*

When am I to gain You?

Oh my Lord,

to this wily one, since there is no other way of redemption
except through You,

and seeing that I would suffer otherwise,
take pity on this sinner and save me.

Other than this, there is no way
of merging in You, Oh Eesan!

77

Oh Eesan, I, an ignoramus,

talked of Your *nirbhedhaa* state and said:

"There is nothing but You either here or there"

Oh my Lord and Lord of us all!

Oh Ninmalaa Who has assumed Lordship
over this lowliest one,

Oh Effulgence,

the existence of a God

76. A question put to me by Dr. M. Varadaraasanaar in 1962 prompted me to meditate on this stanza. The present translation is the result thereof. Maanikkavaachakar's thoughts are well echoed in a saying by the Rev. William Barclay in his book, *The Daily Study Bible*. He says: "Real religion is never a second-hand thing, a carried story, a repeated tale. It is a personal discovery."

Aldous Huxley has more to say on this matter in the chapter on 'Truth' in his *Perennial Philosophy*. Being a longish passage, it is reproduced in Appendix III.

Other than You alone,
my mind will not think of. 78*

I, a cussed fellow, who had not reached You in the past
through thought, deed, hearing, speech
and the rest of the worthless five senses,
have not, Oh Sire, burnt myself to death ;
ashamed in my mind, I have not broken down ;
yet I survive hoping to reach You,
Oh my Father ! 79

Though Your feet, which enslaved
this steely hearted wily one,
had left me after pouring into my mouth
the sugarcane juice
and mingling in me,
there was the fire
and here were I (merrily) feasting !
What a farce is it for me to say
that there is yet love in me towards You ! 80*

ix. Ecstatic Bliss

The title of this sub-decad in Tamil is *Aaananda paravasam*. *Aanandam* means bliss ; *paravasam* means 'being under the control of some external force', which, here, is bliss. One would expect the ten stanzas of this sub-decad to be full of a mad joy ; in any case, no one would expect the stanzas to be a doleful, dismal disheartening disparagement of oneself when they are

78. 'nirbhedhaa' — is a name for the Godhead. It means the undivided one'. See also stanza 10 of decad 31.

80. 'there was the fire ... feasting' — I did not immolate myself in the fire.

not complaints against the Lord. A song of Jalal-ud-din Rumi, a Persian mystic of the 13th Century A. D.—many of whose utterances parallel Maanikkavaachakar's in a remarkable way—reveals to us the esoteric meaning of this eternal lament which pervades *The Tiruvaachakam*. He sings :

- “ *How should I not mourn like night, without His day
and the favour of His day-illuming countenance ?*
“ *I am in love with grief and pain
for the sake of pleasing my peerless King.*
“ *I complain of the Soul of my soul, but, in truth,
I am not complaining, I am only telling.*
“ *My heart says it is tormented by Him,
and I have long been laughing at its poor pretence. ”*

Since someone far advanced in the spiritual life and deeply steeped in *The Thiruvaachakam* has given these sub-titles, when they are beyond our comprehension, our duty is not to dismiss them as meaningless but to wait patiently for enlightenment by the spirit of Maanikkavaachakar in its own time. Meanwhile we should keep chanting these stanzas again and again with humility, love and sincerity.

The Sub-decad

Saying that it will not do
for the seed of falsehood to be lost,
You detained me here ;
all those who are to Your liking
have come unto You
and have merged in Your feet.
I am sinking with fear,
Oh our mendicant Lord of Aavoor !

What shall I do ?

Won't You speak out ?

81

I have been talked of as one of Your devotees :

With the sacred ash

I have been smeared :

By the men of the world, as Your slave,

I have been abused :

As it is not possible for me to suffer any longer,

I yearn for You ;

I have subjected myself to You ;

I am Your slave indeed !

82

Slave, am I not ?

Enslaved me, did You not ?

All those who have become Your slaves

have arrived at and merged in Your feet.

This misery yielding body I do not discard,

Oh our Lord of Civalokam !

Would I, hardened one, never find the way

to see You to the delight of my eyes ?

83*

I do not see the way to see You.

Though I saw You that day,

what a harm have I done to myself

by speaking futile words !

Oh transcendental Effulgence,

Oh Male, Oh Female, Oh Sweet Ambrosia,

Oh Father, I am dead-beat indeed !

Ah me, taking hold of what,

will I, powerless and shameless cur, rise again,

Oh my Lord ?

84

Oh Partner of the Mistress
 with glances like the fawn's,
 Oh mystic One unknowable
 by the Upanishads !
 Oh Honey ! Oh Ambrosia ! Oh elusive One to thought !
 Oh King who puts up with the offences of mean me !
 I have spoken a little harshly, (because)
 the devotees have gone
 to enter the great City of Bliss ;
 I and Falsehood
 have been left out. 85*

Left out we have been, Falsehood and I :
 I have gained but this—
 the inability to gain
 true love unto You.
 The devotees, who have wholly cast their lot with You
 and know nothing else (but You),
 doing notable things and arriving at the (true) path,
 Oh Civan, have reached Your feet. 86*

Give, Oh my Owner, to this slave,
 love to Your twin feet.
 The world from which there is no return,
 Your devotees have entered ; I have stayed out.
 Like a blind cow lowing when the village cows low,
 I, your slave, inexperienced in love unto Your twin feet,
 but filled with longing for You,
 stand outside weeping. 87*

85 & 86 'Falsehood' - the body

87. 'Like a blind cow lowing' etc. - when at even-tide, cows have come back from the pasture and are in their barn, they low on seeing their calves; but a blind cow can only low futilely, for it cannot see its calf.

Weeping I keep on, without following
 those wax-fallen-into-fire-like ones,
 who, with love-incarnate mind towards You.
 on seeing Your lightning-like anklet-girt
 golden feet,
 worshipped them and followed You.
 I have been born in vain;
 by what means shall I serve You ?

88

Oh Lord, You graciously rid the disease of birth
 of the long-standing devotees who serve You.
 and bestow on them Your bejewelled feet !
 If even this is impossible in my case,
 do grind to dust the karma of me
 who resemble a thickset bamboo,
 and come quickly and bestow on me
 Your exceedingly cool feet,
 Oh unreality-dispelling Reality !

89

I myself am a lie ! my heart is a lie !
 My love too is a lie !
 But if karma-tainted me would weep,
 I could gain You,
 Oh Honey ! Oh Ambrosia !
 Oh Essence of the sugarcane !
 Oh sweet great One, bestow on me, Your slave,
 Your grace that I may come unto You.

90

x. Surpassing Bliss

The remarks offered for the previous sub-title will
 apply equally well to this one also. But not all of the
 ten stanzas of this sub-decad are doleful. There is a
 change from the 94th stanza onwards ; an air of ecstatic

cheer and optimism breathes through the last seven stanzas which justifies the title to this sub-decad.

The Sub-Decad

Oh unchanging Flood of great mercy,
Your real devotees, who had gained
the state of inseparability
from Your flower-like twin feet,
have reached Reality.

Though infinite You, benignly manifest,
came as luminiferous human being and looked at me,
I, a cur with uncontrite heart,
have become the tail-end one.

Ah, the degradation I have suffered !

91

Oh Partner of the goodly Dame
with collyrium glittering eyes !

After You had come and taken me into Your service,
other than as a glittering gold cup
in the hands of a lisping child,
as rare I did not consider You.

Oh You with hue of the white ash
gleaming on the body !

Your real devotees have reached Reality.

Will you go away leaving me interred
in this Falsehood ?

Tell me, does this befit You ?

92*

Unsuitable am I ; falsehood have I ;
when You invitingly looked at me,

meaning "come unto me",
pains I did not take ; wiles I have ;
die I did not.

Oh You with blossoming lotus-like feet !

Oh You with rosy hue !

You and those devotees who have received Your grace
having graciously gone there,

You detained me here.

Is this just, my Lord and Lord of us all ?

To the karma of wilful me, is there no end ? 93

There is no love in me to Your anklet-girt feet,

Oh Partner of her with cardamom scented tresses !

By the miracle of turning a stone into a soft fruit

You made me a devotee to Your anklet-girt feet ;

no limits has your grace, Oh our Lord !

By whatever means whatever I may do,

yet, capable indeed You are to show me

Your anklet-girt feet, and redeem me,

Oh spotless heavenly One ! 94

Oh You Whom even those of the heavenly land
could not know !

Oh You Whom even the ancient Upanishads
could not follow !

Oh You Whom even those of other lands
could not know !

Oh You Who sweetly enslaved me !

Oh You Who led me a dance with this body !

Oh You Who make me melt and drink You in !

Oh You Who enacted the Drama of Enlightenment,
that the trickery of this world may perish in my case ! 95

Without seeds You will raise crops ;
 the earth, the sky, everything completely,
 You will establish and withdraw as well.
 This great wily outcaste, You made a madman
 At Your temple doors
 and a bondsman to great devotees.
 If it is a tree grown by one,
 even though it is highly poisonous,
 one will not fell it ;
 I too am just like that, Oh Lord Who owns me ! 96,

Oh Lord Who owns me, obeisance to You !
 Other than You, have I henceforth anything
 that can be support for me ?
 Command my services, obeisance to You !
 Oh the heavenly ones' transcendently transcendant Lord,
 obeisance to You !
 Hindmost of everybody have I become,
 obeisance to You !
 Oh my great merciful One ! Obeisance to You !
 You made me Your slave, obeisance to You !
 Oh You Who are the beginning and the end,
 obeisance to You, my Father ! 97

Oh Father to me ! Oh Ambrosia ! Oh blissful One !
 Oh You Who, thawing my heart,
 resemble honey which makes my mouth water !
 Oh You Who, making me a more privileged one
 than devotees who belong to You,
 became a drink for me to drink You in !
 Oh Lord with a scintillating crown ! Oh Succour !
 Oh reserve Wealth to Your servitors in distress !

Tell me, would You leave me
to suffer in the world,
Oh our Monarch ?

98

Oh Monarch ! Oh our Lord ! Bid me come unto You !
Oh prior One to Vishnu
and the one with four faces !
Oh our Lord, bid me come unto You !
Oh our Lord, the last remaining One,
after everything has entirely ceased to be,
Bid me come unto You !

Bid me come to praise You with my tongue
out of love for your tinkling anklet-girt feet,
and to sing Your glories, Oh Destroyer of sin !

99

Sing I should of You only, obeisance to You !
Singing thus,
and with my heart thawing and thawing and melting,
and my body limbering and limbering, I should dance ;
Obeisance to You !

Your anklet-girt blossom which dances on the hall

(in Thillai)

this cur should join ; obeisance to You !
Rid for me this nest of worms, obeisance to You !
All unreality I should abandon, obeisance to You !
Graciously grant me liberation,
Oh Reality to Your real devotees !

100

6. NEETHTHAL-VINNAPPAM

(Detestation of the World)

(Sung at Uihtharakosamangai)

Neeththal-vinnappam means 'Forsake Me Not Plea'. Commentators explain in various ways the phrases *vittiduthi kandaai* and *viduthi kandaai* either of which appears in every stanza of this decad. To K. Subrahmania Pillai, they mean 'rescue me from *paasam*'; to Kadhiresan Chettiaar they mean, 'will You desert me'; to Navaneethakrishna Bhaarithiyaar and Dhandapaani Desikar they mean, 'You are deserting me, ponder on this Yourself'. The last two commentators seem to have overlooked the word, *vidin* which appears in stanzas 46, 48 and 49 of this decad and which means 'if you forsake me'. In the context of this word, the phrases, *vittiduthi kandaai* and *viduthi kandaai* can only mean, 'see that You do not forsake me!' The words 'see that You do not' in all the previous stanzas build up to the threats in the three stanzas referred to above. Moreover, by my rendering, *kandaai* is also accounted for by the words 'see that.'

The sub-title is clear enough, and its spirit can be seen pervading almost all the stanzas of this decad. The very fact that Maanikkavaachakar pleads to God not to forsake him is sure sign of his detestation of the world. For lovers of the world are only too ready to forsake God and too indifferent to being forsaken by God.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

Oh Rider on the bull, Who, out of mercy,
mingled in me—hindmost one—and enslaved me !
Forsake me and see what happens,
Oh Owner of the virile tiger's skin !
Oh King of eternal Uththarakosamangai !
Oh Lord with matted locks,
I am wearied my Lord,
do please hold me up. 1

Though I would not desert the *kovvai* red lips
of women with upstanding breasts
which have not lost their bloom,
see that You do not forsake me.
I belong to Your glorious galaxy of devotees ;
I am not outside it.
Oh King of Uththarakosamangai !
Though I, furtive one, stole away from You,
what was the reason
for Your discovering and enslaving me ? 2*

Oh You who abide in resplendent Thiruvaaroor !
Oh King of eternal Uththarakosamangai !
Oh Partner of Her with tightly laced
bejewelled breasts !
Oh You Who bring me up !
See that You do not forsake me,
who has taken root like a tree
on the bank of the river of delight

2. '*kovvai*' — an edible vegetable, the fruit of which is red in colour.

to the five senses
provided by dark-eyed dames.

3*

Oh Uththarakosamangai's King
on Whose tall crown shines
a tender shoot of a white moon !
Oh dazzling Flame resembling pure gold and lightning !
See that You do not forsake me
who, while You took me
in the crook of Your arm of waxing mercy,
moved away, and flits about here tantalisingly.

4

See that You do not forsake me
who, since long,
keep falling for women of degrading words,
like moth which dives into dazzling flame.

Oh Uththarakosamangai's King
with crown decked with flowers
ploughed by bees with honey-stained mouth
and six legs !

Though You waylaid me and fed me
Your grace abounding ambrosia, alas, I refused it !

5

Refuse I did, without understanding Your grace,
Oh my Gem !

See that You do not hate me and forsake me.
Destroying my accumulation of karma,
do assume lordship over me,
Oh King of Uththarakosamangai !

3. 'delight to the five senses provided by dark - eyed dames' — these words remind one of Thiruvalluvar's lines : " All the five senses-seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling and touching, -can be experienced at the same time only in this maiden with the shining bangles " Kural - 1101

Would not the great put up with
the faithlessness of little pups ?

6

Oh true One Who enslaved me—false one—
as a thing of worth

and covered up my faithlessness !

See that You do not forsake me,

Oh You with duskiness of throat
from eating the poison !

Oh King of Uththarakosamangai !

Oh rosy One ! Oh Civan !

Oh Lord Who rids this mean person
of his birth cycle !

7

See that You do not forsake me
who sweat (with fear) wondering
how Your superb grace
will judge my misdeeds,

Oh Uththarakosamangai's king
owning the foe-frightening bull
with the collar of chiming bells !

Fear and the five (senses)
pull me, karma ridden one, from two sides.

8

Oh only Chieftain

to all the wondrous three worlds !

Eternal Uththarakosamangai's King !

Oh You who reveal Yourself holding in the right hand
the three-leaved war-headed spear !

See that you do not forsake from-You-parted me—
me of straggling locks who resemble an ant
caught inside a brand burning at both ends.

9

6. 'accumulation of karma'—karma accumulated in past births, *sanchitha* karma (see note to line 20 of decad 1 in Appendix III).

See that you do not forsake me
 who, in spite of gaining admission to Your shining feet,
 pine away, dissipating this body.
 Oh King of Uththara-kosamangai of arbours
 resounding with the *vilary* tune
 played by bumble bees !
 Oh You Who, with Your heart turned against them,
 burnt the (three) cities
 with Your strong granite bow ! 10

Oh Honey which wells up in the mind
 of karma-ridden me !
 Oh Uththarakosamangai's king !
 Oh magnanimous One
 Whose golden-hued body
 shows off the lustre of the ash smeared thereon !
 See that You do not forsake me
 who, on the dissident five senses seducing me,
 have separated from Your gem of a flowery foot. 11

Oh magnanimous One,
 See that You do not forsake me
 who, on Your enslaving me,
 cling to the five senses,
 and am bent on deserting You,
 Oh Uththarakosamangai's King
 Who is skilled in wielding the spear
 to the terror of the enemies !
 Oh great Sea of limpid ambrosia
 on which, I, of evil nature, feed ! 12

See that You do not forsake me
 who, like a dog lapping up the waters of the sea,

am incapable of letting my mind
 sink in Your sea of grace,
 Oh Uththarakosamangai's King
 Who lives ever only in the body
 of never deserting devotees !
 Oh flower-petal Honey ! Oh Gem !
 Oh Ambrosia ! Oh my Flood of nectar !

13

See that You do not forsake me
 who, like tongue getting parched
 in the midst of a flood,
 though in receipt of Your grace,
 am unable to get out of misery.
 Oh You who abide in the minds of devotees
 who love You !
 Oh King of Uththarakosamangai !
 To me of crafty mind, do, in your grace, grant
 a joy never before enjoyed by me.

14

See that You do not forsake me
 who, though having beheld Your anklet-girt-feet
 with rejoicing mind,
 have not come forward to merge in them,
 Oh Uththarakosamangai's King
 with anklet-girt feet —
 the source of light to all the true orbs of light !
 Oh easily accessible Lord of my father !
 Oh my Father Who has lordship over me !

15

Oh lightning like Lord,
 see that You do not forsake me
 who, with no one to tell me :
 “ Oh my son, fear not ! ”,

wander about grieving therefor.

Were I to compare You to anything,
truly, You are comparable to Yourself only,

Oh King, of Uththarakosamangai !

You are like a mother to me,

like a father You are to me,

Oh my rare Possession !

16

Oh my Possession ! Oh Refuge to me, forlorn one !

Oh Terror to those who disparage Your praises,
see that You do not forsake me.

Oh Grace which true devotees quaff !

Oh King of Uththarakosamangai

of beautiful groves !

Oh dark Mystery ! Oh Obvious one !

Oh You Who are here and hereafter for me !

17

Abide in me and enslave me,

sell me, mortgage me, but this apart,

do not turn me away—

me a stranger who has sought your hospitality—

Oh Lord Who ate the poison

as exceedingly sweet ambrosia !

Oh King of eternal Uththarakosamangai !

Oh Medicine to those who are crippled

by the disease of birth !

18

Oh King of Uththarakosamangai !

Oh You Who frightened Her

Who is willowy like the *vanji* creeper,

18. 'mortgage me'—It is interesting to note that Thirunavukkarasar sings (4—999) "To the five persons You mortgaged me".

'Persons' = senses. We may presume that Maanikkavaachakar too means this by this phrase.

by skinning the hill of a cruel elephant !
 Oh virile One ! See that You do not forsake me.
 May the fire of Your eternal grace
 engulf the forest of my potent karma
 to its utter ruination.

And my birth, do weed out to the very roots
 and assume lordship over me.

19

Like creeper without a staff,
 I am distressed, Oh mellowy One !
 See that You do not forsake me who wither here,
 Oh You Who are far above
 beyond reach of the heavenly ones !
 Oh King of eternal Uththarakosamangai !
 Oh Ether ! Oh Earth !
 Oh You Who are fire, wind and water.

20

Oh my Father !
 Oh luminous One,
 Who, in the mind of karma-ridden me,
 matching honey and milk
 candy and ambrosia,
 keeps melting my flesh and bones !
 See that You do not forsake me
 who, like a small shrub
 underfoot in a fierce elephant-fight,
 am harassed by my (five) senses.

Oh luminous One ! Oh light radiating white One —
 white from liberal dusting of sacred white ash !
 Oh near One to true devotees !
 Ever far One to others !
 Oh rare to be known feminine One !

Oh ancient masculine One !

Oh You of neuter aspect !

See that You do not forsake me. 22

See that You do not forsake this worthless wretch

who, with the aid of what he has received from You,
keeps on multiplying his misdeeds

and diminishing in love.

If You forsake me, I will be ruined !

Moreover, there is none to hold up this slave,

Oh my life's Principal !

Acceding to You, I have been greatly heartened,

Oh You Who are all I have ! 23

Oh Lord dressed in the skin of the goodly elephant

of surprisingly large trunk with a hole in it !

See that You do not forsake

deluded, ostentatious, impure, me

who, while there are worthy things to do;

keep doing only those that are not.

Like (obstructing) ants swarming round

the mouth of a pot of ghee,

the five senses prevent me from reaching You. 24

See that You do not forsake worthless forlorn me

who, like a round worm in the midst of ants,

am in torment, being gnawed by the senses.

Oh State (of Bliss) which is gained

by the highest of the high

who have apprehended

the very same fragrant blossom feet

against which cruel Death came up to his dismay !

Oh Lord with the repute

of not parting from Your devotees ! 25

See that You do not forsake from-You-parted frightened me
 who am like small fish gone limp
 on the vast waters ceasing to be.
 Oh lustrous Gem of the heavens
 with matted locks where hides the pale cool moon
 in the shape of a small boat tossing
 on the deep pool of the boiling torrential waters
 of the vast Ganga !

26

See that You do not forsake me
 who, due to waning wisdom,
 walk between the hills of the breasts of women
 with teeth like mature pearls,
 and stumble ignominiously.

Oh purifying Gem,
 keep me tied in the midst of your devotees
 who weep and tremble all over their body,
 and, enslaving me, do show me yet once more
 Your enlightenment-incarnate anklet-girt feet.

27

See that You do not forsake me
 who, with my senses perplexing me,
 am duly perplexed
 and am turning aside to the false path.
 Oh Bestower of mercy,
 You ate the poison of the triple waters (the sea)
 to the consternation of heaven and earth ;
 Oh You who owns this slave !
 I (too) tremble (with fear),
 Oh the family Deity Whom I worship !

28*

28. i. 'the triple waters'—rain water and surface and sub-terranean waters.

You weeded out my clan (of five senses) ;

You weeded out my foibles.

Oh my Father, with the victorious bow, the Mount Meru !

See that You do not forsake me.

Oh my Father of hue of the beautiful lotus,

Who wears a garland of *kondrai* of golden sheen !

Oh peerless One !

I am swirled about by the five *malams*

like curd set upon by the agitating churn.

29*

See that You do not forsake me

who, like cool curd set upon by the churn,

am agitated by the senses till I am on fire

and sprout seeds (for my rebirth),

Oh pure One Who wears a bleached skull (in Your locks)

and garlands of clusters of flowers

and long entrails round the neck,

and has, moreover, sacred ash

and red sandal paste widely applied (on the body) ! 30

28. ii. 'I (too) tremble (with fear)'—Just as the *devaas* including Brahmaa and Vishnu trembled with fear when the poison appeared out of the sea. See stanza 3 of decad 5.

29. i. 'clan (of five senses)'—The word in the original is '*kulam*'. Some commentators interpret the word as family pride. But that meaning is appropriate only in stanza 5 of decad 31. '*Kulam*' is a word of Sanskrit origin. In *Lalithaa Sahasranaamaavali*, the meaning given to the word '*Kuloththeernaa*' is: "Oh You Who is beyond the reach of the bunch of five senses". I feel that the word *kulam* in our context too should be taken to refer to the bunch of five senses.

29. ii. five *malams*—they are *aanavam* (ignorance), *kanmam* (the twin deeds of good and evil), *maayai* (the matrix of all things), *maayeyam* (all things arising from *maayai*), and *thirothaayee* (the power which hides knowledge of the past from a soul).

Oh pure One ! Oh adroit One
 Who becomes the vast cool waters,
 the sky, wind, earth and fire !
 See that You do not forsake me,
 Oh You of white, dark, green
 and red complexion !
 Oh You with waist band of snake with shiny hood !
 Oh You Who overcame
 the murderous elephant with wide feet !

31*

Oh You never-forsaking One,
 see that you do not forsake me,
 who am desolate, fearing the five senses
 which resemble a murderous elephant !
 Oh You rare of being touched by any
 other than devotees par excellence !
 Oh sparkling great Gem !
 Oh You with discoloured throat,
 Who make a meal of the poison
 which, blackening the sea, rose from it,
 while scorching fire swirled around !

32*

See that You do not forsake me
 who, doing whatever comes to mind,
 and, drunk on the honey of Your mercy,
 strut about exultingly.
 Bestowing on me, as You did once before
 Your fragrant blossom feet,

31. White.....complexion-white on account of the ash smeared all over the body ; dark and green refer to the colour of Paarvathi nestling on his side, red refers to the complexion of the male half of Civan's body.

32. ' You never-forsaking one ' - see stanza 37 decad 5.

and, calling me to serve You,
 enslave me, my Father,
 and weed out this weed of an ebullition. 33

See that You do not forsake me
 who, doing things according to my will,
 and, without ardour in Your will, rush (to my undoing).
 When are you to ripen my mind
 like plantain fruit,
 and appear before me
 like fragrance-filled sweet honey dripping (therefrom) ?
 Do let me know,

Oh transcendental One of Kailash mountain! 34*

Oh transcendently transcendent One !
 Oh Haran Who likes my fraudulence
 as much as You like Your seasoned devotees,
 see that You do not forsake me.

Oh You Who wear the budding moon
 with the silhouette of the hare
 and the snake in juxtaposition !

Oh great One !

The congenital five-mouthed snake attacks me,
 striking terror in my mind,
 and makes me, a karma-ridden one,
 seek a hole (to hide in). 35*

34. 'honey-dripping (therefrom)'—the devotional songs of St. Thirugnaanasambandar are full of references to honey dripping from ripe plantain fruit.

35. i. In Hindu mythology, an eclipse is said to be caused by the mythological snakes *Rahu* and *Kethu* which are called *Chaayaa grahaas*, shadowy planets. So the snake and the moon are enemies. Yet Civan has made them live together in peace in his matted locks. This reference explains the special grace mentioned in the earlier sentence.

See that You do not forsake me
 who am broiled by those scorching senses
 belching fire and smoke like fire in a tree hole !
 Oh heaven's mighty King
 with scintillating matted locks
 from which drips luscious honey
 from honey-filled fragrant *mandhaara* flowers,
 and in which sink the bumble bees
 which practise the high and low notes of music. 36

Oh King ! Oh You with fragrance-laden crown !
 Instead of telling this nescient youngster
 not to fear for his offences,
 see that You do not (on the contrary) forsake me.
 Oh *Bhujanga* of holy golden feet
 Who married the waves-endowed Dame
 of white teeth and black eyes !
 As if several mountains have united to assail me,
 doughty *karmaas* have come to assail me. 37*

Oh You Who resemble
 a fire burning widespread in every direction !
 Oh King of the cremation ground !
 Oh Ambrosia to Your galaxy of devotees !
 Oh rare One to be trailed ! Oh unique Succour
 Who removes the loneliness of forlorn me !
 See that You do not forsake me
 who, parting from You

35. ii. 'moon with the silhouette of the hare' — this corresponds to 'the man in the moon' belief of the West.

35. iii. 'the congenital five-mouthed snake' — the five senses born with me.

37. 'waves endowed Dame'—the river Ganga.

for fear of the assailing senses,
am not leaving the cave of sweet-spoken women. 38:

See that You do not forsake me,
the companion of Karma,
who, while You, unique Succour, were with me,
egotistically walked on my head.

Oh Succour of the mind of karma-ridden me !

Oh my life's Principal !

Oh Savings to me in my need !

I cannot endure even a whit
this strong net of a body, the home of sorrows. 39:

See that You do not forsake me
who, trapped in the net of glances of women
with glances like those of a fawn trapped in a net,
keep wandering about in a daze,
Oh You with head adorned with a day old pale moon !
Oh Dispenser of mercy !

Oh Chieftain of the mountain called Kailash !

Oh Bridegroom of the mountain Maid !

Oh my life's Principal ! 40:

See that You do not forsake me
who, diving in the hot waters of lust,
am trembling (with fear) on the crocodiles—
red lipped women—biting me.

This foul-smelling flesh-ridden disease-harboursing body
I cannot endure, Oh Civan !

Is this just ? Is this just ?

Oh Partner of the Dame with jewelled speckled breasts. 41*

41. 'speckled breasts'—the breasts of women, when they are in full bloom, are said to develop shiny pale spots. These probably occur on account of the stretched skin. These are considered beauty spots.

'Oh my Goal of Bliss,
 see that You do not forsake me
 who, on Your anklet-girt feet
 graciously bestowing the goal on this slave,
 am fated not to discard this flesh !
 'Oh eternal One with matted locks,
 into the deep waters wherein
 the moon dives and hides in fear
 on seeing the shiny snake
 hidden in the cavity of the bleached skull
 spread its hood for a short while
 and fold it up again !

42*

'Oh eternal One ! Oh lightning-like One
 Who delights this youngster
 who does not know the way to unite with You !
 'Oh You Who uttered the vast Vedic true texts !
 'Oh You Who are beyond words !
 'Oh You Who stand in front of
 the unswerving band of devotees !
 'Oh You Who stand at the back of them !
 'Oh You Who are the whole creation !

43

See that You do not forsake butter-like me
 who am sinking completely in the violent fire
 called sharp lance-like eyed women.
 Do unite me with Your galaxy of worthy devotees,
 who, worshipping your blossom feet,
 go heavenward.
 I am Your vassal, our Lord !
 Oh my Owner ! Do not forsake me

42. 'into the deep waters wherein'—the waters of the Ganga.

who keeps on doing wrong.

Would I ever sing (Your praises) ?

44

See that You do not forsake me

who does not sing (of You) or bow (at Your feet),

and who does not abandon

this lush flesh for Your sake.

Oh Gem, Who has hid Yourself (from me) !

Amazed thereat, I do not wail ;

I do not search for You ;

I do not run about crying

“ Where is Civan ” ? Has anyone seen Him ? ”

Pausing, I do not melt inwardly ;

I grieve (in vain).

45

See that You do not forsake me

who, like the fly on the jack-fruit

keep craving for the breasts of women

with fawn-like glances.

If You do leave me,

I shall broadcast slanders (about You)

saying that You are

a cloudy-throated Person

from eating the poison of the sea ;

a colourless Person ; (a mere) human being ;

a Person of deteriorating intelligence ;

an ancient great Mendicant.

46*

See that You do not forsake me

who, backsliding after gaining the privilege

46. i. ‘colourless One’ — The attributelessness of God is derided here.

46. ii. ‘human being’ — refers to Lord Civan appearing often as a human being.

of the ancient service unto Your slurless feet,
 talk slightingly of You,
 and am aghast (at my impudence).
 Oh You with the chaplet by the side of which
 a boat of a crescent moon rides
 on the imprisoned waters
 of the comely and majestic *Mandaakini*
 which comes shoving along pearls and conches
 and *mandhaara* flowers.

47*

Oh mighty One Who wears a string of skulls
 like a garland of stars
 and sports in the hands the fire and the snakes!
 Forsake me not.
 If You do, when the exalted ones ask me,
 "Whose henchman are you?",
 I shall hold You up to (derisive) laughter
 by replying that I am the honourable servant
 of the servants of the King of Uththarakosamangai! 48

I shall hold You up to (derisive) laughter
 and say at length
 that this contemptible life and service of mine
 are dedicated to You — Eesan.
 Forsake me not.
 If You do, I shall traduce You by calling You
 the Madman Who dons the skin of the elephant,
 the Lunatic with the skin (of the tiger),
 the Crank Who feeds on poison,
 the Crazy One with the fire

47. '*Mandaakini*' — The river Ganga imprisoned in the matted locks of Civan.

from the hamlet's cremation ground,
 and (to crown all) the Nitwit
 Who has even me as His bondsman !

49

Whether I traduce You or praise You,
 Do not forsake me,
 who languishes here repenting for his sins.
 Oh You resplendent like a red coral hill !
 Oh You Who have sway over me !
 Oh You Whose right it is to feed on ambrosia,
 but Who ate the raging poison
 out of compassion for the lowly creatures !

50

Thiruchchitrambalam

7. THIRUVEMPAAVAI

In Adoration of Sakthi

(Sung at Thiruvannaamalai)

Thiruvempaavai is a composite word. It is made up of three words—*thiru*, *em*, and *paavai*. *Thiru* means holy or 'sacred'; *em* means 'our'; and *paavai*, in the general sense, means 'woman', and, in a special sense, in this context, means 'Paarvathi', the spouse of Civan, i. e., Sakthi, the dynamic element in the Godhead. A festival was in vogue in the ancient days in the Tamil-naadu in which Paarvathi was worshipped by young girls in the Tamil month of *Maargazhi* (December-January). Something has been said about this festival on pages 47 & 48. Commentators would have it that eight aspects of Sakthi are invoked in this decad. They would have it that (the Godhead) as *Sadhaacivam*—the

joint aspect of *ichchaa sakthi* (will), *gnaana sakthi* (wisdom) and *kriyaa sakthi* (work)—invoked *Manonmani*, and that *Sarvaboothathamani*, *Pa'appramathani*, *Palavikkarini*, *Kaali*, *Routhri*, *Settai* and *Vaamani* were invoked in turn by each,] beginning with *Manonmani* invoking *Sarvaboothathamani* and so on./ Sri Dhandapaani Dhesikar of Thiruvaavaduthurai Mutt (monastery), in fact, condemns those (who do not subscribe) to this view. Mahaamahopaadyaayaa Pandithamani Kadiresan Chettiar, who preceded Dhesikar, and did know that his interpretation will meet with condemnation by Dhesikar, interprets this decad in his own fashion. He agrees that certain persons were invoked or roused from sleep, but he thinks that they are girls of various ages ranging from 12 to 5 year olds, that the first eight stanzas describe each girl waking another, beginning with a twelve year old girl waking an eleven year old girl and so on. He goes further to say that no one has explained to him why matters regarding the creation of the world should be brought into a commentary of this decad. For this is what the waking up or invoking of the various *sakthis* means.

I am therefore in good company if I strike a different note. No doubt, this decad deals with the adoration of *Sakthi*, but the *Sakthi* is *Paarvathi*—the first and greatest woman who ever wooed Civan. According to the *Puraanaas*, *Paarvathi* performed many austerities during several births to gain again and again the hand of Civan. The role of *Paarvathi*, however, is taken in this decad by *Maanikkavaachakar* whom I have elsewhere christened as *Civakaami* (pp. 49–50). A single

song of St. Thirunaavukkarasar serves as a summary of the 20 stanzas of this decad and as an irrefutable authority for my interpretation, (pp. 46 et. seq.). St. Thirunaavukkarasar sings :

First, His name she heard ;
 The colour of His form she heard ;
 Later, of His Aaroor she heard ;
 Straightway, mad after Him she became.
 Mother and father the same day she forsook ;
 She abandoned the traditions of her neighbours ;
 She forgot herself ; her name she lost,
 And set forth, our maid, to the Chief's feet.

. This decad and the next fifteen have been (a subject for my meditation for over fifteen years), and I wrote an article called *Passionless Passion* early in 1956 which was published in Tamil Culture of July 1956, sixteen months before I set eyes on Navaneethakrishna Bhaarithiyaar's commentary on 25-11-1957. Later, I wrote an one act drama in Tamil on this decad in 1958. Later still, at the command of His Holiness Sri Kaanchi Kaamakoti Sri Sankaraachaarya Swaamigal, I had the privilege of writing meanings for this decad and the *Thiruppalliezhuchchi*, the 20th decad, for the use of children.

This decad is in the form of either dialogues between the girls and Civakaami or, as is the case in most stanzas, speeches by the girls addressed to Civakaami or *Paavai*. Each stanza ends with the refrain *elor em paavaai*. It is reminiscent of songs of the past called '*paavai*' songs which used to end with

the same refrain. The refrain has no special significance unless it be an appeal to the *paavai* worshipped by the children (pp. 47-48) or, sometimes, a vocative term used by the girls to call Civakaami to pay heed to their words. The phrase has been omitted in the translation.

An analysis of the stanzas may be helpful to the readers. Stanza 1 is a speech by the girls who have come to take Civakaami to the river. The time may be between 4 and 5 a. m. It is a common practice to sing all the stanzas of this decad in *Boopaala raagam*. I felt that this was inappropriate, and, therefore, I requested Sri V. Raajaamani Iyer, the Principal of a music school in Delhi to research into this matter. He set the various stanzas scientifically to different *raagas* and I had the privilege of having the work published in 1958. It has a valuable introduction by Sri P. Saambamoorthi, then Head of the Department of Music in the Madras University.

Stanzas 2, 3 and 4 are arguments between the girls at the door of Civakaami's house and Civakaami inside the house on her bed. **Civakaami's words in these and other stanzas where they occur are printed in italics in the translation.**

Stanzas 5, 6, and 7 are words of the girls still at the doorstep. Civakaami is still abed, and has now gone obstinately mute after her outbursts in stanzas 2, 3 and 4.

At stanza 8 the time is probably 5-15 or 5-30 a. m. The world has begun to stir from its sleep. The girls

are still at the doorstep and Civakaami is still abed, mute, and pretending to be asleep or, perhaps, she has gone to sleep just as the girls had feared in stanza 4. Or, more probably, she is in commune with her beloved, Maadevan.

At stanza 9, the girls, impatient of trying to make Civaakaami wake up and open the door, ignore her and invoke Paavai-Paarvathi-and take their vows without waiting to go to the river and formally make an image of Paavai and take their vows before it.

In the 10th stanza, Civakaami, in whose drowsy mind the taunts of her companions have finally penetrated, gets up from bed and, opening the door, comes out and addresses the girls in annoyed and impatient words. The girls have been pestering her to sing of the Lord, and she, a mature soul, realises the futility of words to describe or praise the Lord. Hence her outburst.

Navaneetha Krishna Bhaarathiyaar would have it that the door was opened by Civakaami at the 9th stanza, but it is better to place this incident in the 10th stanza as it fits in with the outburst of Civakaami. ✓

Stunned for the moment, by the outburst of Civakaami, the girls turn to address Paavai with one more prayer in stanza 11.

Stanzas 12 to 15 and 17 and 18 are attempts by the girls to persuade Civakaami to join them in the bath in the pond. One may well imagine that all the

girls were in the water, while Civakaami stood in a trance on the bank, her mind full of the Godhead of whom she sang with vehemence in the 10th stanza. The state of Civakaami, has so much engaged their mind to the exclusion of their main purpose that the girls remember it only occasionally as in stanzas 9, 11, 16 and 19. Since they address Civakaami even in the 18th stanza as "Oh damsel, let us jump into the flower-filled water and sport about", it is clear that Civakaami (never came out of her trance) and never joined the girls in the bath. This is just as it should be. Because God-intoxicated persons do not feel hunger or thirst or need for the ablutions of the day when they are immersed in the ocean of bliss beyond reach of any words addressed to them.

Stanza 19 is a fervent plea to the *Paavai* to take care of this God-intoxicated child. ✓

Stanza 20 is the closing paean of praise of the Lord's feet. Perhaps Civakaami too joined in the chorus.

Due to the gracious initiative of His Holiness Sri Kaanchi Kaamakoti Sri Sankaraachaarya Sri Chandra-sekara Saraswathi Swamigal, this decad is sung throughout the length and breadth of Tamilnaadu — and in far flung regions too — throughout the month of *Maarghazi* (December-January) each year, and conferences and meetings in hundreds are held in that period to expound this decad and its counterpart, *The Thirup-paavai*.

Readers will note a marked contrast between the spirit of the poems of the *Thiruchchathakam* and the

Neeththalvinnappam (decads 5 and 6) on the one hand and that of the *Thiruvempaavai* and the next fifteen decads. They will not find in any stanza of these sixteen decads any breath of the desolation, despair and self-disparagement and self-denunciation characteristic of the 150 stanzas of decads 5 and 6. For those stanzas relate to the Purgative Way. On the other hand, these stanzas belong to the Illuminative Way, and rise from subdued elation to joy, from joy to ecstasy and from ecstasy to all surpassing bliss, and end in a note of exultant achievement in the last stanza of the 22nd decad.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

Even after hearing us sing
of the unique great Effulgence
without beginning or end,
Oh damsel with bright wide eyes,
do you still sleep
or are your ears hard of hearing?
On hearing the sound of the paeon of praise
of the anklet-girt feet of Maadevan
come echoing down the street,
sob after sob tearing her frame,
her body in a trance,
this damsel has rolled off her flower-strewn bedstead
and lies here helpless!
What, what is this condition, Oh my chum?

1*

1. "Maadevan"—St. Thirunavukkarasar sings:

"To whomsoever are called devaas, to all of them,
Besides Maadevan, no devan (Lord) is there".

“My Passion to Paranjothi”
 you would say day and night
 when we used to talk.

When did you set your love
 on this flower-strewn bed,
 On bejewelled one?”

*Tut tut, is this the behaviour
 of handmaidens of the Lord?*

Is this the place for badinage, even-as a joke?

*The Effulgent One, He of the Land of Bliss,
 Who graciously comes to bestow on us,*

in His grace,

*the blossom feet which shies away
 from the praise of the heavenly ones —
 to that Eesan in Thillai's dance hall,
 who are we to say
 that we are filled with love?*

2

Oh you with pearl-like white teeth,
 who used to come forward in the past
 and talk sweetly till your mouth drooled
 of *Aithan, Aanandan, Amudhan*,
 come and open your door.

Oh devotion-filled ones!

Oh Eesan's ancient devotees!

Oh decorous ones!

*Is it wrong if the Lord enslaves new devotees,
 ridding them of their baseness?*

How great your love is, don't we all know?

2. i. 'Paranjothi' — transcendent Effulgence.

2. ii. The lines in roman type are spoken by Civakaami's companions;
 the lines in italics are spoken by Civakaami. Same throughout this decad.

Wouldn't people of pure minds sing of our Civan ?
This is all we want of you.

3

Oh you with shining pearly teeth !

Has it not dawned yet ?

Have all my companions

of colourful parrot-like speech come ?

We shall count and tell you the true tally.

Meanwhile, do not close your eyes in sleep
and spend your time wastefully.

But as our mind is softening, thawing and melting
with singing

of the unique Medicine to the heaven dwellers—

the Subject *par-excellence* of the Vedaas,

the Delight to the eyes—

we will not do it.

Come yourself and count ;

and if the number falls short,

go back and sleep !

4

Oh you crafty one

with milk and honey exuding tongue,

who speak only such fairy tales as

that people like us will come to know

the Mountain Whom Brahmaa and Vishnu did not see,

Open your door.

Even if we yell ' Oh Civan ! Oh Civan ! '

singing of the form of Him

whom the earth, the heavens and all the rest do not know,

and of His nobleness in ridding us of our faults

and graciously enslaving us,

you will not comprehend, comprehend you will not,

Oh you with cardamom scented tresses !

5

Oh Fawn ! yesterday you said :

‘ I myself will come tomorrow and wake you all.’

Tell us where those words have gone shamelessly.

Has it not yet dawned for you ?

To us—

who have come singing

about the anklet-girt far reaching lovely feet

of the One unknowable by heaven or earth or others,

Who of His own accord comes,

and, conferring signal honour on us,

enslaves us —

you do not open your mouth,

you do not melt all your body over.

Such conduct befits you only.

For us and the rest (of the world)

it befits to sing of our King.

6

Oh Mother, are these the acts

of a handmaiden of the Lord ?

(In the past), on hearing the fanfare announcing Him

Who is impossible of being known

by the manifold immortals —

the unique One, He of great magnificence —

you would be the first to open your mouth saying :

‘ Lo, there is Civan coming ’ :

Before one could say ‘ Oh Southerner ’,

You would become like wax fallen into fire.

Listen, now all of us are severally saying :

‘ My Beloved ! My King ! My delicious Ambrosia !

yet you sleep !

Since you lie inert like hard-hearted scatter-brains,
what kind of a sleep is this ? ”

7

On the cock crowing,
 birds have begun to chirp everywhere.
 On the sounding of the seven scale music pipes,
 white conches have begun to sound everywhere.
 Of the peerless transcendent Effulgence,
 of the peerless transcendental Mercy,
 of peerless subjects par excellence,
 we sang. Did you not hear us ?
 Bless you ! What a sleep is this ?
 Open your lips !
 Is this the way to become love-filled
 towards the Sea (of grace) ?
 Do sing of him Who stood as the first in every aeon —
 the Partner of the frail One. 8

Oh earliest ancient Thing
 of all earliest ancient things !
 To all latest novelties,
 Oh You Who are in turn of same nature !
 We, your esteemed devotees,
 who have gained you as our Lord,
 will pay homage to the feet of your devotees only.
 Likewise, to them alone will we belong ;
 the very same will become our husbands.
 In the manner they are pleased to ask us to serve,
 we shall, as their slaves, serve.
 In this manner, if You, our King,
 would bestow grace on us,
 nothing we would lack. 9

*Far beneath Paathaalam,
 the nethermost of the seven nether regions,
 and ineffable are His feet ;*

*His flower-laden crown is all knowledge's end.
 A Lady by Him is His form, but not the only one
 Though the Vedaas, the heaven-dwellers
 and all the world sing His praise,
 praises fall far short of Him, our unique Companion-
 Dweller in His devotees.
 Therefore, Oh you damsels of blameless lineage,
 handmaidens of Haran's shrine,
 what is His city? what His name? who His Kin?
 who are not? how sing we His praise?* 10*

Diving noisily into the wide tank
 hovered over by bumble bees,
 and churning the water with our hands

(as we swum about),

Oh Sire, we, your servitors since generations past,
 have lived singing of your anklet-girt feet.

Oh You of rosy hue like roaring fire!

Oh You drenched with white ash!

Oh Treasure! Oh Bridegroom of the Dame
 with narrow waist and collyrium glistening eyes!

10. i. 'Paathaalam'—The universe is divided into the upper seven worlds and the lower seven worlds. The upper seven are: *Bhoolokam*, *Bhuvialokam*, *Svalokam*, *Janalokam*, *Thapalokam*, *Mahalokam* and *Satyalokam*. The first three, it may be mentioned in passing, are incorporated in the *Gaayatri* mantra as *Bhoo Bhuv* and *Sva*. The seven nether worlds are: *Adhalam*, *Vidhalam*, *Sudhalam*, *Tharaadhalam*, *Mahaadhalam*, *Rasāadhalam* and *Paathaalam*.

10. ii. 'Our unique Companion'—The original reads: *oru thozham*. Recent researchers think that this is an error and that it should read: *oru thozham*. *Thozham* means an unit of count and is perhaps the highest unit of count in Tamil. In terms of this interpretation, the words *oru thozham thondar ulan* will be translated as "He has one-thozham of devotees" i.e., countless devotees.

Oh Sire ! In Your game of graciously enslaving people,
we have experienced and done with every move
which those who would be redeemed experience.

Do, therefore, save us that we may not get wearied ! 11

He is the sacred waters in which we bathe
with ardour

that the sorrow of shackling birth may cease.

He is the Dancer Who dances in good Thillai's hall
with fire in His hand.

He is the Prankster Who creates,
protects and withdraws this heaven and earth
and everything indeed.

Speaking words (of praise about Him),
with bangles jingling and jewels tinkling,
and with bumble-bees humming over jewelled tresses,
let us splash about in this tank flourishing with flowers,
and, lauding the golden feet of our Owner,
bathe in this vast spring water. 12

Into this seething deep pool
of lotus-abounding sweet water,
which resembles
by the fresh blue lotus's dark flowers,
by the blossoms of the fresh red lotus,
by the families of beautiful (water) birds,
by the snakes besides,
and by the presence of those
desirous of washing away their malam (dirt),
let us dive and sport about
with bangles jingling
and *cilambus* tinkling in unison,

and breasts swelling,
 setting the churned waters asurging.

13*

With ear pendants adangling,
 with the pure gold ornaments aswinging,
 with the chaplets on our tresses atossing,
 with the swarm of bumble-bees swaying in unison,
 bathing in the cool water,
 singing of the dance hall (in Thillai),
 singing of the Vedaa's Content,
 singing how the Content He becomes,
 singing of the glory of the Effulgence,
 singing of the encircling garland of *kondrai* flowers,
 singing of the manner of His becoming

the source of all things,
 singing of how He becomes the end too,
 singing of the qualities of the feet
 of the bangled One
 Who, separating us (from the common herd),
 cherished and brought us up,
 let us sport about (in the water).

14*

Now and then crying : 'Our Lord ! Our Lord !'
 she will never cease speaking
 the glories of our Lord.
 With her mind brimming with joy,
 and her eyes wet with an unceasing long stream of tears,

13. ' *cilambu* ' — a hollow anklet worn by women in which pearls or precious stones are enclosed so that, when the wearer walks or dances, a very musical tinkling sound is heard as the pearls or precious stones roll about inside the jewel.

14. ' bangled One ' — Sakthī, mother aspect of Civan.

she resembles Her Who comes down to earth
from time to time.

The heavenly ones' feet she will never worship.
Whoever is capable of thus enslaving a person,
making her mad with love for the great King,
singing of that Adept's feet to our mouths' content,
Oh damsels of corsetted jewelled breasts,
let us dive in this lovely water teeming with blossoms
and sport about. 15

Oh Cloud ! Come forward and shrink the sea,
and rise up parading in the hue of Her
Who owns us ;
break out in lightning flashes
like the slender waist of Her
Who has sway over us.
Reverberate like the golden *cilambu*
on the holy feet of our Mistress ;
display a bow like her eyebrows,
and, like the very grace
which She Who lords over us
pours on the devotees of our King
Who is never disjunct from Her,
pour as rain. 16*

Oh damsel of fragrance-impregnated dark tresses !
let us sing, that prosperity may flourish in us,
about the Knight, our King with beautiful eyes—
Ambrosia rare to us devotees,
Our great Lord—
Who, making ours a bliss not found

16. i. 'in the hue of'—in the hue of Parvathi who is dark in colour.

16. ii. 'bow'—rainbow.

in Vishnu or Brahmaa or the *devaas*
 or anywhere else,
 and Who, ridding us of our faults,
 steps, in His grace, into each of our homes
 and bestows His red lotus-like golden feet.
 Let us sing of Him
 and jump into this lotus-abounding water
 and sport about.

17*

Like the clusters of gems
 on the crowns of the heavenly ones
 losing their lustre when they bow at the lotus feet
 Of Him abiding in Annaamalai,
 on the eye-dazzling sun's rays coming up
 and dispelling the darkness,
 the stars,
 their cool sharp brilliance becoming dulled,
 have faded away.
 Oh damsel, let us sing of the anklet-girt feet
 of Him

Who is the female, the male, the neuter,
 the well-lit heavens, the earth,
 something apart from all these,
 and eye-satisfying ambrosia as well,
 and jump into this blossoms abounding water
 and sport about.

18*

17. i. This decad is addressed to Civakaami.

17. ii. 'into each of our homes'—In consonance with an oft repeated statement by Maanikkavaachakar that God entered his body and took abode in it, this phrase should be taken to refer to the bodies of the handmaidens of Civan. Also refer to note v to stanza 8 of decad 20.

18. It will be clear from the first section of this stanza that the time would be not less than 6-30 a. m., if we remember that it is the month of December-January in Tamilnaadu.

In our fear, we say afresh that (well known) adage :

‘The child in your arms is Your own protege.’

Our great Lord, we will tell You something ;

listen !

Let not our breasts join in an embrace

with the shoulders of anyone

but Your devotees.

Let not our hands do any work except for You.

Night and day let our eyes not see anything

but You.

If, here and now, this boon You would grant us,

what does it matter to us where the sun rises ?

19

Obeisance to You ! graciously bestow on us

Your feet-blossom—the beginning (of all things) :

Obeisance to You ! graciously bestow on us

Your pink leaf Shoots—the end (of all things) :

Obeisance to the golden feet—

the (source of) manifestation to all beings !

Obeisance to the flowery feet—

the savour of life to all beings !

Obeisance to the twin feet —

the end to all beings !

Obeisance to the lotus (feet)

not seen by Vishnu or Brahmaa !

Obeisance to the golden flowers which enslave us

that we may be redeemed !

Obeisance to You !

We will now have our *Maarghazhi* bath, *Oh Paavaai* ! 20*

Thiruchchitrambalam

20. ‘pink leaf Shoots’ — feet.

8. THIRUVAMMAANAI

Exulting Bliss

(Sung at Thiruvannaamalai)

Thiru means Holy. *Ammaanai* means an indoor game played by girls (see page 51). The game is played with five or seven cowries or pebbles which are tossed into the air and caught on the back of the hand. It is played usually to the accompaniment of a song sung exultingly by the player and ending with the refrain *ammaanaai*. The long 'a' at the end of the word is a vocative case ending. The songs are usually in praise of Civan and His exploits. St. Thirugnaanasambandhar also refers to this game in these words : " Kazhumalam where, in the homes of each of the open handed triple fire tenders (brahmins) wide dark eyed damsels sing of the Lord's nature as they play the games of *Kazhangu*, or handball or *ammaanaai* (1. 129. ii) Civakaami uses this game to sing the praises of her lover. All her acts, talk, thoughts, dreams, everything is only about her lover. She invests even an ordinary pastime with the aura of her love for Maadevan. As this decad is placed in the setting of this game, the word *ammaanaai* comes as a refrain at the end of each stanza. It is omitted in the translation.

The sub-title needs no comment. One can almost physically feel the bliss running through the stanzas of this decad.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrabalam

Let us sing of the very same anklet-girt,
far-reaching feet of beatific mercy —
 those (bliss) overflowing blossom feet
 of Him of cocoanut trees abounding South,
 the Lord of Perunthurai, the lovely-eyed One,
 rare to be beheld by even the red-eyed tall Vishnu
 in spite of burrowing for it —

Which, coming down, in grace, on earth,
 and severing our (chain of) births
 and enslaving even persons of our sort,
 hail us in the guise of a Brahmin
 and bestow deliverance on us.

1

Let us sing of Him rare to be beheld
 by earth dwellers, heaven dwellers,
 dwellers underground,
 or those in regions besides,
 by none of these at all,
 but to us an easily-accessible Celebrity,
 the Southerner, Perunthurai's Lord.
 (Let us sing) of Him who making me god-mad,
 came and, entering my heart
 as unsatiating ambrosia,
 bestowed the path of no return —
 Him, the exceedingly covetable, ocean-like One,
 Who cast His fishing net on the surfy sea.

2*

2 'Who cast His fishing net' etc. — See note in Appendix III. to line
 10 of decad 2

Who, making me—

a cur of a laggard with a mind which is a stone—
god-mad and, kneading that stone into a ripe fruit,
immersed me in the flood of His mercy
and rid me of all my karma.

5

Did you hear, Oh my chum,
how the unique One enticed me?

The Southerner of Thirupperunthurai
surrounded by lime plastered ramparts,
showing me everything hitherto never shown,
and showing His form as Civan,
showing His lotus feet
and showing His honeyed Mercy,
Himself took us into His service
and assumed lordship over us
to the merriment of the people of the country
and to the end that we gain the high heaven.

Of this let us sing.

6*

Of the Indweller Who dwells inside those
who contemplate Him unceasingly,
of the Far One, the Knight, the Southerner
Who abides in Perunthurai,
of the Vedaa's Lord,
of Him with the Dame-abiding half (body),
of the Bridegroom

Who enslaved even curs like us,
of Him Who is a veritable mother to us,

6. i. Compare this stanza with lines 55 to 65 of decad 3 and with decads 30 and 31.

6. ii. 'Mercy'—Sakthi, Paarvathi.

of Him Who Himself is the seven worlds,
 of Him Who rules the same,
 let us sing.

7*

Of the magnificent One

Who graciously endowed a prize
 for the melody-bearing song,

of Him with one part (of His body) bearing a woman,
 of the Lord of Perunthurai,

of Eesan of the famed vast spheres
 borne by the sky,

of the God with eye-bearing forehead,
 of the golden Body

Which, bearing earth (on its back) for wages
 in buzzing Madurai,

was struck by the King (with his cane)
 and carries (to this day) the scar thereof,

of Him let us sing.

8*

He with the crescent moon,

the Bard of the Vedaas,

the Lord of Perunthurai,

He with the thread of several strands

(across His body) —

on stately steed He rides ; dusky is His throat ;

red golden His form, ashes white thereon ;

7. Indweller — *antharyaami*, the one immanent in all beings.

8. i. 'Who endowed a prize for the song—probably refers to the occasion when Lord Civan composed a poem for Dharmi, a poor Brahmin, and helped him to obtain a prize offered by the Paandiyar King.

8. ii. 'The golden Body which was struck' etc. — see story on page 14.

first in all worlds is He.

Bliss unceasing —

the traditional boon —

to His veteran devotees He graciously gives.

That all the world may amazed be,

of Him let us sing.

9

Of the Vedaa's Lord

greater than the *devaas* ruling the heavens,

of Him Who stands as an ideal of magnanimity

to the kings who rule the earth,

of Him of cool Paandinaadu

which gives (to the world) sweetness-abounding Tamil,

of Him with part (of His body) ruled by a woman,

of Him of Annaamalai

Who, in Perunthurai cherished by me,

showing His eye-delighting anklet-girt feet,

enslaved this cur,

of Him let us sing.

10

Of the Partner of Her with cup-shaped breasts,

of the Southerner of Perunthurai,

of Him of the nature

of unfailingly melting the hearts of those

who have sought (refuge at) His feet,

of Him with the water-logged matted locks

Who turned Paandinaadu into the Land of Bliss,

of the Farthest of the farthest,

Who (yet) is inside those

with minds assigned to Him

as collateral

for the blissful far-reaching anklet-girt feet,

of Him let us sing.

11

Oh collyrium glittering eyed one, listen !

Of Him Who—

while Brahmaa, Vishnu and Indraa

sought Him in every birth—

by His sweet grace,

enslaved even me in this very birth

and saved me from being born again,

of Him Who manifests Himself

in the real thing—the soul,

and Who has that same real thing as His abode,

of that Being Who (nevertheless) Himself becomes

the ultimate eternal abode to all things,

of Him, our Civan, let us sing.

12

(As we play the *ammaanaï*)

to the jingle of the bangles loaded on our arms,

to the dance of the rings adorning our ears,

to the tossing about of our black gleaming tresses,

to the exuding of honey (from flowers thereon),

and to the humming of the bumble-bees

(hovering over the flowers),

let us sing of the rosy hued One,

of Him who wears the white ash (on His body),

of Him with palms never known

to have been joined (in supplication to anyone),

of Him Who fills everywhere,

of the Reality to those who are His devotees,

of Him—the Lord of the Vedaas—

Who is not to those Who are not,

of Him Who abides in Aiyyaaru.

13

Let us sing of the anklet-girt flowery feet of Him,

the Lord of Heaven,

Who, pleased to put to rout the karma of me
 who was wearied of birth and death
 as elephant and worm, as men and devaas,
 and as other creatures as well,
abode in my flesh and melting it
and, coming in the guise
 of honey, milk and sugar-candy equalling sweet King,
took me, in His grace, into His galaxy of devotees. 14
 Let us sing of the garland of *mandhaara* flowers
 of the red-garlanded Southerner
 of Perunthurai surrounded by groves,
 Who, in the sacrifice performed by Thakkan,
 graciously ground the Moon (under His heel),
 crushed the shoulders of Indraa,
 cut off the head of Echchan,
 and knocking off the teeth of the radiant Sun
 who runs his course in inter-stellar space,
 scattered them about,
 and who delighted in putting to rout
 the *devaas* in several directions. 15*

Let us relate
 how the honey-filled *kondrai*-garland-wearing Knight
 Who, mingling in me as flesh and life,

15. i. 'mandhaara flowers'—flowers of *Erythrina Indica*

15. ii. The incidents referred to in this stanza occurred during a sacrifice which Thakkan, the father of Paarvathi in one of her incarnations, conducted. He had not invited Civan, his son-in-law, to the sacrifice. This was a deliberate insult. But the *devaas*, including Brahmaa and Vishnu, partly from greed for the presents usually given away at a sacrifice and partly from fear of Thakkan, attended the sacrifice ignoring the insult to Civan. Civan arrived at the sacrifice in a great rage and lay waste the sacrifice and punished *devaas* in the manner stated in this stanza.

Experience,
 honey, ambrosia,
 and candy of the sweet sugar-cane,
 graciously bestows on us
 the path not known by the *devaas* even.
 (Let us relate how that Knight)
 is resplendent enlightenment-endowed eternal gnos̥is
 to us ;
 and to the countless manifold creatures,
 their King.

16*

Wear shall I (in my hair) the *kondrai* blossom ;
 wearing it, Civan's brawny shoulders
 shall I embrace.

Embracing it tightly, swoon shall I ;
 pausing, I shall sulk ;
 (sulking) I shall yearn for those rosy lips.
 Search shall I, melting inwardly ;
 searching I shall think
 of Civan's anklet-girt feet alone.

Droop shall I ;
 again, bloom shall I :
 The rosy feet only of the fire-bearing Dancer
 shall we sing.

17

Let us sing
 of Him with one half of His body
 gleaming with the radiance of Her
 of parrot-like soft speech,

16. 'Experience' — compare with Thomas Merton's words on (page 78, para 1 which read : " You are not you, You are fruition. : If you like, you do not have an experience, you become Experience."

of the wise One unseeable by Vishnu and Brahmaa
 who set out to see Him,
 of the clarified Honey (of enlightenment),
 of the Brahmin Who, coming down condescendingly
 and abiding in splendour-abounding Perunthurai,
 took pity on me,
 and, through inconceivable sweet grace,
 appeared as an effulgent One
 and was moved with compassion
 to make His light shine
 inside my innermost being.

18

Let us sing
 of Him Who is prior to the Trinity,
 of Him, Who being the Whole One
 exists after the end,
 of the Pinggakan,
 of Him established in Perunthurai loved by me,
 of the Lord of Heaven,
 of Him with one half (of His body)
 occupied by the Dame,
 of Him of Aanaikkaa in the south,
 of Him of South Paandinaadu,
 of Him, my Beloved,
 of Him who is like ambrosia
 to those who call Him their Father,
 of that magnificent One,
 let us sing.

19*

19. i. 'Whole One' — see note to line 29 of decad 3

19. ii. 'of Him Who exists after the end'. — Compare with Rumi's words: "all except God doth perish" in quotation under note to lines 26 to 32 of decad 1. The Godhead alone survives after the cataclysm.

Let us place our trust in the time immemorial repute
of the Magnificent One
of qualities rare to be found in others—
the Lord of Perunthurai,
Who, graciously coming on the victorious charger,
and, setting aside the foibles of His devotees,
but taking into account their good qualities only,
cherishes them and severs
the encircling link of kinship
(called I and mine)—
and sing of the supreme Bliss
which has taken possession of us
that we may cling to It
so that the bonds of *paasam*
may be severed.

20*

Thiruchchitrambalam.

9. THIRUPPORCHUNNAM

Mind Steeped in Bliss

(Sung at Thillai)

Thirupporchunnam is a composite word. It is made up of *Thiru*, *por* and *chunnam* and means the sacred golden powder. In the past, hard physical labour of a repetitive type was accompanied by a song to relieve the tedium of the work. In the same manner, pounding

19. iii. 'Pingakan' — Him with the hairdo; see note to line 7 of decad 1.

19. iv. 'Aanaikkaa' — Thiruvanaikaa, a suburb of Tiruchirapalli.

20. 'victorious charger'—gnosis.

the scented bath powder had its own songs. Maanikka-
vaachakar sets in this background the third in our
series of sixteen decads dealing with passionless passion.
Civakaami calls upon all her companions to come and
assist her in pounding the powder for the bath of
Civan, her Beloved. It is a very highly ceremonial
affair and the arrangements are elaborate. One
component of the powder is turmeric (see note to
stanza 9) which gives it a golden colour.

Again, the sub-title needs no explanation; every
line in every stanza reveals a mind steeped in bliss.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrabalam

Hang strings of pearls
and garlands of flowers (from the lintels),
and arrange the pots of seedlings,
the censers and the goodly lamps (in their places).
Oh Sakthi, Lakshmi, Mother Earth and Sarasvathi !
Chant the song of " May You live many years "
Oh Siddhi and Gouri, Paarpathi and Ganga !
Come and take up the whisk of yak tail hair.
Let us sing of our *Guru*, Him of Aiyaaru,
our Father,
and pound the golden powder for His bath. P

1. i. 'pot of seedlings' — it is a symbol of fertility. In anticipation of auspicious occasions, seeds of cereals — usually paddy — are allowed to germinate into seedlings in specially decorated pots of mud or metal which have a special place in the appurtenances required for a marriage ceremony. After the ceremony, the seedlings are immersed in a river or tank.

For our Lord with flower-decked long matted locks,
 the golden sacred (bath) powder has to be pounded.
 Oh damsels with eyes like tender mango split in two !
 Come along, come and sing with us.
 Hail (all the others) that servitors may not be left out ;
 dance and pray that our King, our Dancer,
 He and the Mistress may come and enslave us.
 To this end, the red gold-like powder let us pound. 2
 Put on the beautiful sacred ash
 (on your foreheads) ;
 wipe the floor, scatter pure gold (dust)
 and spread riches thereon.
 Set up a bough of Indraa's own *karpaka* tree,
 and placing beautiful lamps everywhere,
 hoist the flag.
 For the (bath of the) King of space-dwellers —
 the Lord of Brahmaa,
 the Spouse of him with the disc,
 Father of benevolent Velan —
 for Umaa's Husband Who enslaves even people
 of our sort,
 lovely golden powder let us pound. 3*

1. ii. 'Sakthi, etc., Siddhi, etc.'—various goddesses whom Civakaami calls to her help.

1. iii. 'whisk of yak hair'—used to ward off flies and insects, a pair of which is ceremonially swirled and brought down with a swish by attendants standing on either side of an idol or a great personage.

2. 'damsels with eyes like tender mango split in two'—the tender mango, when it is no bigger than a thumb, presents on its inner surface, when cut into two along the length, the shape and features of an eye.

3. i. 'Spouse of him with the disc'—spouse of Vishnu, i. e., husband of Vishnu, for Paarvathi is said to be an aspect of Vishnu.

Adorn all the pestles with strings of jewels ;
decorate the stained mortars

with colourful silk cloth.

On the loving devotees, call blessings
that they may eternally thrive.

Let us sing of the copper plate roofed temple
of Kaanchi's holy Ekamban,
which all the world praises and honours ;
and, rooting out the bonds of karma,
let us sing and pound the golden powder.

4*

Oh damsels with smiling red lips!

Unless it be after us,

not only Indraa along with other immortals
and the muttering *devaas* and all the heavenly host
will we not allow to pick the *arugu* grass,
but also Brahmaa and Vishnu

who (habitually) pick the *arugu* grass.

Let us sing

of the copper plate roofed temple of holy Ekamban,
of the Bowman Who shot an arrow
at the strong fortresses three,

3. ii. 'riches' — the nine gems.

3. iii. '*karpaka* tree' — a tree in Indraa's domain which yields whatever is wished for.

3. iv. 'hoist the flag' — flag hoisting is, to this day, an important event in temples of Tamilnaadu at the commencement of any festival. The diagram of the ground-plan of a temple facing page 118 shows the position of the permanent flag-staff, *kodi-maram* or *dwaja-stambam*

4. i. 'stained mortars' — stained with the colour of the turmeric.

4. ii. 'Ekamban' — the name of the Deity (Civan) in the temple at Kaanchipuram.

and for the bath of our three-eyed Father
let us pound the golden powder.

5*

Even with all the world as mortar;
still making it look insufficient,
so many great souls are wielding pestles.
To join in this service,

so many devotees have come up,
making the world insufficient to hold them.
Let us rejoice singing and singing
of the son-in-law of the (king of the) mountain,
Who, enslaving us for our good,
bestowed on us His day-fresh blossom feet
to wear (on our heads),

and pound the golden powder.

6*

With our armlets and bangles jingle-jangling,
with the band of devotees cheering and cheering,
with the town's folk jeering and jeering at us,
and we in turn jeering and jeering at them,
for the tinkling anklet-girt soft-footed Dame's Partner,
for the transcendently transcendent One—
the king resembling a great golden mountain—
for His bath let us pound the golden powder.

7

Oh comely goodly damsels with bright wide eyes !
With striped bangles jingling
and lush breasts swelling,

5 'arugu grass'—a kind of creeper grass see note to line 201 of decad 4. Before a person is given a ceremonial bath, it was a custom for certain privileged persons to dip a sheaf of *arugu* grass in ghee and annoint the head of the person to be bathed.

6. 'Son-in-law of the King of the mountain'—Once, Paarvathi was born as the daughter of Himavaan, the King of the Himaalayaas ; after performing many austerities, she gained the hand of Civan.

with shoulders and forehead shining
 with imprint (of sacred ash),
 saying and saying: "Your vassals we are, our Lord!",
 and singing and singing of the ways by which He,
 showing us His morning-fresh flower-shaming blossom feet,
 here and now enslaves us who are worse than curs,
 for His bath, let us pound the golden powder. 8

With the world entire as the mortar,
 with the great Meru as pestle, planted therein,
 Truth called turmeric, lavishly pouring therein,
 singing and singing of the rosy feet
 of the exalted Southerner of Perunthurai,
 holding the red golden pestle in our right-hand,
 for the bath of our Sire,
 the dweller in lovely Thillai,
 let us the golden powder pound. 9*

With our pearl-decked breasts bobbing and bobbing,
 with our bumble-bees-swarmling tresses
 tossing and tossing,
 with our minds with Civan swinging and swinging,
 with droplets on our streaked eyes
 trembling and trembling
 with infatuation with our Lord
 tripping and tripping,
 with birth in the case of others (except us)
 sporting and sporting,

9 i. 'turmeric'—the root of a plant (*curcuma longa*) of the ginger family used by Hindu women in their bath. It has depilatory properties. It would seem that, long ago, men also used a bath powder of which turmeric was an ingredient.

9. ii. 'red golden pestle'—Meru mountain is said to be golden in colour.

with our Father along with Mercy, His spouse,
dancing and dancing.

for His bath, the golden powder let us pound. 10*

with the whiteness of Your teeth
shedding moonlight around,

with the coral lips of your open mouths quivering,
sing of the manner by which He enslaved us,
and singing and singing of the way

He took us into His service,

search for our Lord,

and searching with perplexed mind

and joyfully feeling relieved,

dance on,

and for the bath of Him Who danced on the hall

(in Thillai)

pound we golden powder. 11

Oh damsels fair with lotus-like eyes,

golden bangled arms,

and snake's hood-like lower belly !

Sing of Him with the dark tinted throat,

the Medicine of the people of the skies,

the ruby coloured Dancer,

our Sire, the Lord of our Fathers,

a false One to the false,

and Truth to the true,

Who inducting us into His fold,

shows us His rare qualities.

Singing thus let us the golden powder pound. 12

10. 'with birth sporting' - the bonds of birth having been severed in the case of Civakaami and her companions, birth has found other victims to make a sport of.

Oh damsels fair with gold jewel decked breasts,
 with lightning-like waist, red coral lips,
 black eyes, white teeth
 and melody-imbued soft speech !
 Singing of the feet of my dear Ambrosia,
 our Father,
 our Lord, Himavaan's daughter's own Husband,
 and son, father, brother (besides to Her),
 our Sire,
 let us the golden paste pound.

13*

Oh damsels decked with beautiful jewels !
 With conch shell bangles jingling
 and anklets tinkling,
 with the garland encircling our sweeping tresses
 tossing about,
 and with *korvai* fruit-like red lips quivering,
 singing of the Kingdom of Civan,
 with our bosoms swelling with overflowing love
 to the anklet-girt feet
 of Him with the coil of matted locks
 where the snake rustles on hearing the Ganga splash,
 let us the sacred golden powder pound.

14

He Who became to us
 the clear juice of the sugarcane of gnosis,
 its treacle, a rare to be obtained blessing,
 'unspoilt honey, flavour of fruits—
 the King, Who, entering our mind
 can become very sweetness,
 the Dancer Who, severing our birth, enslaved us—

13. 'son, father, brother'—Commentators explain this by involved metaphysical and *puraanic* references which need not worry us here.

let us sing blessing Him
 till our tongues get calloused,
 Oh damsels fair with wide eyes like the blue lotus,
 and pound we the golden powder. 15

Singing of the ways by which He,
 coming in our midst,
 enslaves us along with other devotees
 that we may be redeemed,
 and singing and singing the names
 of Lord Civan—

He Who holds in His hand
 the noted bull device embroidered victorious flag.
 the victorious Knight

Who overthrew the (three) cities,
 the Lord Who shows us the red blossom feet
 never known by sight by the devaas on the sky
 even in their dreams,
 let us pound the red-gold like powder. 16*

Singing of the large cluster of honey-laden
kondrai flowers,

singing of Civapuram,

singing of the noted baby moon

of the sky in the holy matted locks,

singing of Vishnu (turned into) the bull,

singing of the flesh-spattered mace and trident

held in His right hands

singing of His eating the poison that day

as very food,

let us pound the golden powder. 17*

16. 'the (three) cit es' — see note to lines 158, 159 of decad 3.

17. 'hands' — Civan is conceived as having four pairs of hands.

Singing of our Lord playing ball with Brahmaa's head,
 singing of His pulling out the Sun's teeth,
 singing of His killing the *gajam* and donning its skin,
 singing of His kicking at Death with His foot,
 singing of His shooting (an arrow)

at the linked three cities,

singing of His grace

in assuming lordship over us poor slaves,

and dancing and dancing,

for our Beloved let us the powder pound.

18*

Singing of the circular chaplet of *kondrai* flowers,
 singing of the *maththam* flower

and singing of the moon too,

singing of the elite dwelling in Thillai in the south

singing of our Treasure in the dance hall therein;

singing of the great snake

worn as a waist band by Him,

singing of (similar) wrist band,

singing of the snake

swaying from the hand closed around it,

for Eesan, let us the powder pound.

19*

For Him Who is the Vedaas and sacrifices too,

for Him Who is the Real and unreal as well,

for Him Who is enlightenment

and ignorance dark besides,

for Him Who is sorrow and bliss too,

18. '*gajam*' — elephant.

19. i. '*maththam*' — flower of the datura plant.

19. ii. The *kondrai* and *maththam* flowers and the moon, all adorn the matted locks of Civan.

for Him Who is the half,
 Who is the whole as well,
 for Him Who is the first and the last,
 for His bath pound we the golden powder.

20

Thiruchchitrambalam

10. THIRUKKOTHTUUMBI

Uniting with Civan

(Sung at Thillai)

Thirukkoththumbi is a composite word made up of *Thiru*, *ko* and *thumbi*, *Thiru* as usual means holy or sacred, *ko* means *king* and *thumbi* means *bee*, not necessarily the honey-bee but any four winged, six legged, buzzing or humming insect which hovers over flowers and drinks the sweet nectar found in them. Today, the dragon fly is commonly called *thumbi* by children. There is also a children's game called *thumbi aadal* or *thumbi suttral*. So, the title spells: 'Sacred King Thumbi'. *Thiru*, however, is not a prefix to *thumbi*, giving it a halo of holiness, but an attribute to the decad which goes by that name. Wherever this syllable appears as a part of the title of a decad, it should be given the above significance. The *thumbi* is asked by the heroine to convey a message to her Beloved. In Indian poetry, the *thumbi*, the crane, the swan, the parrot, the cloud and even the heart are used as messengers of love.

The sub-title is "Uniting with Civan". Sri N. V. Nellaiappa Pillai explains this as the soul uniting

with Civan to the point of extinction of duality, i. e. to the point of the absence of any difference between the soul and Civan. This state probably resembles the state prayed for in the 26th decad, the Decad of Longing for Union. This will be evident from the request made to the king *Thumbi* in the 3rd and 5th stanzas of this decad. However, it is not so much actual uniting with Civan which is dealt with in this decad as the desire for uniting with Civan.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

The flower-seated King, Indraa,
the tongue-seated beauty-endowed Darling,
Naaraayanan and the four Vedaas,
the horse-riding luminary and the heavenly ones —
to the bull straddling rosy Feet
known by none of these,
go and hum (my message)
Oh King Thumbi !

1*

What am I, what worth is my mind,
what matters my learning, who would recognise me,
had not the Lord of the heavenly ones enslaved me
in a moment of mental aberration ?
To the honey-filled lotus feet
of Him of the audience hall,

1. i. 'flower-seated king'—Brahmaa.

1. ii. tongue-seated Darling'—Sarasvathi, goddess of learning, who is said to be seated on the tongue of Brahmaa, her spouse.

1. iii. 'the horse-riding luminary'—the sun.

Who takes His food
 from the flesh-clinging broken skull,
 go forth and hum (my message)
 Oh King Thumbi !

2

Instead of feeding on the honey—
 no more than the size of a millet—
 found in each flower,
 go to the Dancer—

Who, everytime you think of Him, see Him,
 speak of Him, ever and ever
 making all our bones soften,
 squirts honey of bliss (into our mouths)—
 and hum (my message) Oh King Thumbi !

3

Even after finding me lacking in love
 equalling Kannappan's,
 my Sire, by my own measure,
 me too graciously accepted,
 and ceremoniously commanded me : "Come hither".
 To that flood of grace—

Him with the ash-covered golden form —
 go and hum (my message), Oh King Thumbi !

4*

To the true Devadevan
 Whom I, devoid of any hold whatsoever,
 held on to for the severance of my bonds
 in this lamentable world
 which keeps on talking of false gods
 saying : "That *devaa* is a god,
 and this other one is a god",
 go and hum (my message) Oh King Thumbi !

5

4. 'love equalling Kannappan's'—see note in Appendix III.

Oh King Thumbi ! Go and hum (my message)
 to that very wise Lord
 Who cleared the confusion of my mind
 perverted by things called birth and death
 in this insane world
 of hoarded wealth,
 wife and children,
 caste and learning.

6

Will I, lost one, ever forget Sankaran
 Who, on being thought of even for a moment,
 turns into ambrosia in our minds ?
 (If I do) I am ruined !
 (On the other hand) we will never recognise
 (even) the form of the sinful gang
 who are not attached to His imperishable feet.
 To that most eminent One
 go and hum (my message) Oh King Thumbi !

7

Oh King Thumbi ! Go and hum (my message)
 to that never diminishing Treasure,
 to the great Lord of my father's father
 and of my mother,
 to him Who, sprouting up as One
 and putting forth ever so many branches,
 has (always) treated me well
 and has made this cur ride the palanquin.

8*

Oh King Thumbi ! Go and hum (my message)
 to that Sea of Mercy,
 to Him with the discoloured throat,

8. ' Him Who sprouting.....many branches '—God, who is one and yet many, as He is in all created things.

Who stands beyond reach
 of all my tools of knowledge,
 and Who, on my going up to His feet
 and attaching myself to them,
 of His own accord, rid me of the delusion
 of the twin called birth and death.

9

Oh King Thumbi ! Go and hum (my message)
 to that very Treasure shining with His Mercy,
 Who, becoming a mother, came and enslaved me,
 who ridden with disease and age
 and unappreciative, like a dog come into a fortune,
 of all the beauties of His grace,
 remained here like a (grown up) calf
 nosed aside (by its mother).

10*

Oh King Thumbi ! Go and hum (my message)
 to the beautiful golden feet
 of Him Who abides in the hall
 In swans-abounding beautiful Thillai,
 Who, without saying
 “He is a hard-hearted crook”,
 or “He is a self-willed person”,
 melted my stony heart,
 and, out of (sheer) mercy,
 assumed lordship over me.

11

Oh King Thumbi ! Go and hum (my message)
 to my Beloved who had His feet sung by this cur,
 to the magnanimous One
 Who puts up with the offences
 of this wayward devil's mind,

to that very mother of an Eesan
Who, without any disdain,
graciously accepts the services rendered by me. 12

That I am loveless towards Him,
He and I only know,
His enslaving me,
all indeed know.
Oh King Thumbi! Go and softly hum
(my message) to Him
that similar mercy may arise in Him
and that He, my King,
may of Himself (come and) unite with me. 13

Oh King Thumbi! Go and hum (my message)
to the redemption-incarnate Lord,
Who is seed for the world
and is something beyond the world (as well),
Who, coming, in His grace, here (on earth)
along with Her of fragrance-filled
flower-like tresses,
and coming too as formless one,
and as Vedaas-chanting Brahmin,
has assumed lordship over me. 14

I and my mind,
where would we be before our Lord,
if He of the trailing matted locks and His Dame
had not assumed lordship over me?
Oh King Thumbi! Go and hum (my message)
to the honey-exuding rosy feet
Of the Lord Who is the heavens,
the cardinal points and the great sea as well. 15

Oh King Thumbi !

Go and hum (my message) to the Lord
that, on my contemplating
His inconceivable holy form,
my own Lord —
the delightful unconcealed Flood of great mercy —
may assume lordship over me separately. 16*

Oh King Thumbi ! Go and hum (my message)

to His rosy blossom feet,

hailing Him thus (on my behalf) :

“ Oh Sire ! Oh my dear Life !

“ Oh Lord in the cavity of my heart

Who assumed lordship over me,

who, diving deep into (an) unreal (life of) opulence,

was immersed in it day in day out,

thinking it to be real. 17

Oh King Thumbi !

Go and, looking on that ancient form,

hum softly (my message) to Him

with the pelt (of the tiger) and soft silk

(as garment)

with the ear ring and rolled palm leaf

(as ear ornaments),

with milk-white ash and the soft vermilion powder

(on the forehead),

with the green parrot

16. ‘separately’ — as all other devotees had been gathered to the Lord’s feet and Maanikkavaachakar alone had been left behind (see lines 127 to 131 of decad 3), he now requests that a special favour should be shown to him.

and the trident (on the shoulders),
and with armlets to match.

18*

Without saying :

“ He is a crook, an evil one, a vile wretch ”,
the bountiful One came step by step
into my mind in His entirety.
Oh King Thumbi ! Go and hum (my message)
to His anklet-girt Feet
which wipe away, without leaving out anything,
all the sorrows which afflict my mind.

19

Oh King Thumbi ! Go and hum (my message)
to Him of the hue of fire
Who, while flower-seated Brahmaa and Vishnu
stood by dejected,
deeming entry into His presence impossible,
and I was swelling with pride,
provided an eminent seat for this cur
and made much of me (to my great benefit).

20

Thiruchchitrambalam

18. This stanza describes the half male half female form of Civan. The pelt of the tiger, the ear ring, the milk-white ash and the trident are insignia of the right half of His body—the male half. The soft silk, the ear ornament of rolled palm leaf, the soft vermilion, the green parrot and armlets are insignia of the left half of His body, the female-half. Readers may refresh their memories by referring to pages 87 to 99 where the beatific vision vouchsafed to Maanikkavaachakar has been dealt with.

11. THIRUTHTHELLENAM

Merging in Civan

(Sung at Thillai)

I have dealt with the title of this decad at some length on page 51, 52. By a study of the entire decad, the readers will be able to judge for themselves the appropriateness of my interpretation of the title of this decad.

The subtitle to this decad is 'Merging in Civan'. On a superficial consideration of the subtitle to the previous decad and that of present one—which read in Tamil as *Civanodu aikkiyam* and *Civanodu adaivu* respectively—they would appear to be almost similar, if not altogether similar, in meaning, a case of half a dozen of one and six of the other. But there is a distinction between the two subtitles, quite a sharp one. The subtitle to the present sub-decad refers to a state which corresponds to the mystical union of which Thomas Merton writes thus : "In mystical union, God and man, while remaining no doubt metaphysically distinct, are practically and experimentally 'one spirit'." Sri M. V. Nellaiappa Pillai, who could not have known Thomas Merton of our century uses almost similar words to explain this subtitle. He writes : "The soul, though different from Civan in the matter of substance, is one with Him by the act of merging." This is the Caiva Siddhaantaa concept of merging in God. This much only is possible when the soul resides in a human body. But what happens when the soul has been released from the body?

The subtitle is reflected in the phrase “*nam ozhindu Civam aanaavaa paadi*”—singing of the obliteration of the ‘I’ in us and our becoming Civan—appearing in the 4th stanza of this decad. Readers may also remind themselves of the 1st stanza of the 51st decad, a translation of which will be found on pages 98-99.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

The holy Feet which even venerable Vishnu,
going in search of as a boar, did not perceive,
their shape that we may know,
Civan (coming) in the guise of a Brahmin,
enslaved us.

Either a name or a form,
to Him who has none of these,
let us (give and) chant a thousand names
and acclaim our clear conviction
(that He is no other than Civan). 1

The Lord abiding in beauty-abounding Perunthurai,
after He severed
the root of my birth’s seedling,
on none else have I set my eyes.
Formless (then),
now a form He wears.
Singing of the beautiful Aaroor He graces,
let us acclaim our clear conviction
(that it is none but Civan). 2*

2. ‘On none else have I set my eyes’—St. Thirunaavukkarasar sings: “Where is the point in seeing with one’s eyes anything else after seeing the sacred feet of Him, our Lord” etc.

Let us acclaim our clear conviction
 (that it is none else but Civan)
 singing of the manner in which
 all the world laughs on hearing that Civan
 Who stood in a manner
 incomprehensible to Vishnu and Brahmaa
 and to *devaas* other than them,
 would come and melt our hearts
 and take us into His service.

3

Let us acclaim our clear conviction
 (that it is none but Civan)
 singing of **how on the transcendent Effulgence—**
 Who, saving me from the hoax of birth
 that I may not sink
 into the devious ways of the no account *devaas*,
 enslaved me—
bestowing on us the unprecedented rosy spark
 (of **gnosis**)
we perished and became Civan (Himself).

4

Let us acclaim our clear conviction
 (that it is none but Civan)
 singing of how Civan,
 inaccessible to rare ambrosia like *devaas*
 and Brahmaa and Vishnu,
 assumed a form
 and, enslaving us
 to the amusement of the people of the world,
 cast a benignant look that the seed
 of my birth may burn and perish,
 and entering my mind, turned into the Treasure of bliss. 5

Let us acclaim our clear conviction
 (that it is none other than Civan),
singing, with our speech quivering,
 with our inner Light sparkling,
 with a wave of tears dancing on our flower-like,
 bright wide eyes,

of the manner in which **the Lord**

Who wears round His waist the swaying snake,
came down on earth
 with the Dame, Who capers on the hill,
 as His partner **and enslaved** me.

6

Ah! Ah! Civan, rare to Vishnu, Brahmaa,
 Indraa and the heaven dwellers,
 hailing me: "Come, Come",
 enslaved even me by force (here)
 in this world (itself).

Let us acclaim our clear conviction
 (that it is none other than Civan),
 singing of my becoming a very god
 on His etching on my head
 the imprint of His flower-like feet.

7

Ridding me of the twin fears
 of the gyrating-kite-like body's birth and its death
 and of good and evil,

He enslaved me.

Let us acclaim our clear conviction
 (that it is none other than Civan),
 singing in song
 of the singular gift He bestowed on me
 of never forgetting His anklet-girt feet
 even by forgetfulness.

8

Oh damsels with lightning-like wilting waists,
red lips and white teeth !

Singing to the chorus of ' *thennaa, thennaa* '
of the glory of the Lord

Who, even like stripping fibre out of a stone,
made even me, through His mercy,
bow down at His anklet-girt golden feet
and enslaved me,

let us acclaim our clear conviction

(that it is none but Civan).

9

Let us acclaim our clear conviction

(that it is none but Civan),

with tears welling up

in our lance-like eyes filled with delight
and with our hearts brimming with gratitude
to Him with the tinkling anklet-girt feet—
rare to be beheld by the *devaas*

even in their dreams—

or the way in which He

along with Her of bangled arms

resembling the forest bamboo

came and, graciously entering me in my waking hours,
caught me and enslaved me.

10*

10. 'lance-like eyes filled with delight'—The Tamil phrase is 'cina vel kan'. *Vel* means spear, lance *Kan* means eye. What does *cina* mean? One commentator says *large*, another says *small*, a third says *angry*. The second commentator rightly dismisses the third meaning as inappropriate to the context. Let us turn to the dictionary which says: *cinam*=*kopam* (anger), *paru* (bigness), *vimmuthal*, *cinappu* (being angry). *Vimmuthal* has the following meanings: *vimmal* (sobbing) *varu:thuthal* (suffering), *mahizhuurvthal* (feeling delight) *paruththal* (becoming big), *malarthal* (blossoming), *oliththal* (making a sound) and *eenuthal* (begetting or delivering a child). My choice of 'filled with delight' is based on the context.

Let us acclaim our clear conviction (that it is Civan)
 singing of how,
 on the Partner of Her with eyes surpassing the *kayal's*
 mingling in me and enslaving me,
 I became dead to my surroundings,
 how the kinsfolk
 called karma of rare might fell away,
 how my infatuation with the world died away,
 and how, moreover,
 I lost also the powers of speech and action
 which were left to me.

11

Let us acclaim our clear conviction
 (that it is none other than Civan),
 and sing, till It turns sweet in our mouths,
 of the transcendent Effulgence
 Who, while, on that side,
 the throng of ascetics
 who labouring for deliverance
 stood sore wearied,
 graciously enslaved base me (on this side)
 and immersed me in the sea of devotion.

12*

Let us acclaim our clear conviction
 (that it is none other than Civan),
 singing a song on the glory
 of the inconceivable unique great One,
 singing in song the experience
 of His graciously enslaving us
 that we may not lean towards those on earth

12. This is one of many stanzas in which the poet sings of the futility of self-mortification.

or those in the underworlds
or the heavenly ones or any one else. 13*

Let us acclaim our clear conviction
(that it is none other than Civan),
singing, with tears welling up in our eyes
which resemble those of the *sel* fish,
about **Him** of a nature impenetrable by Vishnu, Brahmaa
or the rest of the *devaas* or the *Vedaas*,
Who coming as a subtle One
And entering into me—a humble one—
takes pity on me and melts me. 14

Let us acclaim our clear conviction
(that it is none other than Civan),
meditating on the Southerner's anklet-girt
far-reaching shining feet
and congratulate ourselves on our good fortune
in being able to approach the delightful-to-drink
wide Sea of transcendent Mercy,
and let us, scooping up the water (in our hands),
drink it,
with our minds welling and swelling (with love)
and feel cool and refreshed. 15

Let us acclaim our clear conviction
(that it is none other than Civan),
singing about the gracious anklet-girt feet
of the Wise One Whom Indraa and his retinue,

13. 'Of the experience'—this is how I have translated the word *ner* in the text. I take it as an abridgement of the word *nerthal*=occurrence, happening. Commentators interpret the word in various ways, such as (1) integrity, truth; (2) happenings, (3) happenings witnessed by oneself.

Brahmaa and Vishnu adore,
 of the crazy One, the Lord Who abides in Perunthurai,
 of the Father who severed the (chain) of my birth,
 of Him who abides in the hall in beautiful Thillai,
entering our mind. 16

Let us acclaim our clear conviction
 (that it is none other than Civan),
 praising the feat of the Lord
 in graciously bestowing on us
 His anklet-girt twin feet,
 (thereby) ridding us of the distress
 of floundering, like a premature weanling,
 submerged in the sea
 called false religions and inconsistent scriptures. 17

Let us acclaim our clear conviction
 (that it is none other than Civan),
 singing of **how**
for the sake of Him of a nature
 which never knows weariness
 and which never wastes away
 even if the ether were to vanish,
 the wind were to die,
 and fire, water and earth were to disappear,
I lost my body and soul,
 lost my sense of perception,
 and lost my mind and ego too. 18

Let us acclaim our clear conviction
 (that it is none other than Civan)
 to the chorus of '*ihenna, thenna*'
 singing of the anklet-girt merciful feet of **Him**—

the sole principal Being of the heavenly ones,
 the Seed for those of the underworld,
 Medicine to those on earth,
 Treasure Trove to Brahmaa and Vishnu—
Who came and stood (before us)
 to the delight of the eyes of all of us devotees.

19

Singing of His clan (of devotees)
 singing of the crane's feather (in His hair),
 singing of the excellences of Her
 Who wears the well-turned bangles,
 singing how He ate the poison,
 singing of the melody set up by the *cilambu*
 dancing day in day out in the dance hall
 of water-lapped Thillai,
 let us acclaim our clear conviction
 (that it is none other than Civan).

20*

Thiruchchitrabalam

20 'clan'—*Kulam*, the word in the original has the common meaning of clan or family in most of the places where it appears in *The Thiruvaachakam*, but in stanzas 28 and 29 of decad 6 and in this stanza, the word presents special difficulty. For instance, here, the word cannot refer to the clan or family of God as He has none of these.

20. 'crane's feather'—critics think that the word *kokkirahu* refers to a flower of that name. But Civan had materialised often as a hunter when, true to the role, He used to stick a crane's feather in His hair.

12. THIRUCHCHAAZHAI

Civan's Mercy

(Sung at Thillai)

Thiruchchaazhal is a composite word made up of *Thiru* and *Chaazhal*. *Thiru* means sacred. A brief explanation of the word *chaazhal* has been offered on page 52. The decad is in the form of a duet, the first two lines being a question and the next two lines being the answer.

There is a story associated with this decad. It is said that a King of Jaffna (Ceylon) came with a band of Buddhist monks to Thillai (Chidambaram) and challenged the learned Brahmins to a polemical discussion on the merits of Buddhism and Caivaism. The Brahmins appealed to Civan Who appeared in their dreams and directed them to seek the help of Maanikkavaachakar who was engaged in contemplation of the Lord in a grove outside the walls of Thillai. They did so, and the debate started. Buddhists, who were no match for Maanikkavaachakar, turned abusive. They were promptly struck dumb by the spiritual powers of Maanikkavaachakar. The King, who saw this, told Maanikkavaachakar that he would not consider this a great feat, but if he would make his congenitally dumb daughter speak, then he would admit defeat. The story goes on to say that Maanikkavaachakar put the questions and the dumb girl answered them.

Serious critics have cast doubts on the historicity of this story. I am inclined to agree with them.

Navaneetha Krishna Bhaarithiyar, alone among the commentators, interprets this decad as a duet between a mischievous lady-in-waiting and the heroine of a love drama. The lady-in-waiting deliberately puts provoking questions so that the heroine may reveal her love for the hero in a spirited defence. I have already stated that, in my opinion, the decads from the 7th to the 22nd form so many scenes in a love drama of two acts. Therefore, I agree with this commentator and consider that the questions were put to Maanikkavaachakar, the bride of the Lord, and that the spirited answers were given by her effectively silencing the impertinent lady-in-waiting. The replies of Maanikkavaachakar are not merely answers to an imaginary lady-in-waiting but an answer for all time to all the scoffers in and outside the Hindu community who imagine that they have something devastatingly and crushingly brilliant to say when they sneer at some of the cherished beliefs of the devotees of Civan. In my translation the questions are printed in roman type and the answers in italics.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

What He smears (on His body) is white ash !
 what He wears is an angry snake !
 what He speaks with His lips divine
 is the (*saama*) Vedaa, it seems, my dear ?
What matters what He smears,
what He says, what He wears ?

*The Lord of the universe, of all that has life,
the essence is He.*

1

(You call Him) my Father, my Lord,
the Lord of everyone too,

(yet) how is it that he wears
a much darned rag as loin cloth ?

*Take note that the eternal arts as G string,
and meaning-imbued Vedaas four themselves
as the loin cloth*

He wears.

2*

His residence is the cremation ground ;
the deadly tiger's skin is His grand dress ;
motherless, fatherless,

a (kinless) lone one is He, don't you see ?

*Motherless One, fatherless One,
and (kinless) lone One though He is,*

*note that if He gets angry,
the world entire will be ground to dust.*

3

Brahmaa, Cupid, Death, the Moon,
He irreparably mutilated them,
don't you see ?

*If my three-eyed Beloved Himself punishes,
blessing is it not
to the heavenly ones,*

Oh you with flowing tresses ?

4

What do you say about His beheading
Thakkan and Echchan
and putting to rout the band of *devaas*

2. 'G string'—a string round the waist on which the loin-cloth is hung in front and secured in the rear.

who had come there in large numbers ?
*But note that after He had graciously routed
 the devaas gathered there,
 and thereby bestowing grace on them,
 He graciously gave a new head to Echchan
 on the very spot.*

5

What is the meaning of your Lord
 standing as a pillar of fire,
 reaching from the nether regions to the skies,
 that Brahmaa and Vishnu may not know Him ?
*Reaching from the nether regions to the skies,
 had He not stood so (that day),
 both of them, on account of the altercation
 between them,
 would never have shed their egotism.*

6

What is this (disgraceful thing) ?
 On His placing the daughter of the mountain
 on one side of Him,
 another woman, in a rage,
 plunged into His matted locks ?
*Had she not plunged into His matted locks in a rage,
 great ruin would have been caused,
 making all the world plunge
 into the bowels of the nether regions.*

7*

7. i. 'daughter of the mountain'—Paarvathi, daughter of Himavaan, King of the Himaalayaas.

7. ii. 'another woman'—Ganga. Certain ancestors of one Bhageerathan called the Saagaraas were reduced to ashes by the ire of a sage engaged in contemplation, whom they had annoyed when they went in search of their sacrificial horse which they had let loose after a yagnyaa proclaiming their suzerainty over all the world. Bhageerathan prayed to Ganga, the heavenly river, to come down on earth that he

He ate the poison
which rose up that day
to the surface of the boiling, roaring, sea.

What is this hocus-pocus of His ?

*Note that if He had not eaten the poison that day,
all the grand devaas
including Brahmaa and Vishnu
would have died.*

8

Your Lord who dances with delight in the south—
He of the hall of gnosis in Thillai—
felt a desire for a woman.

Don't you see that He is a very crazy One ?

*Had He not felt a desire for a woman,
Oh fool, note that all those on this vast earth
would have taken to austerities, seeking heaven,
and would have perished*

9*

may dissolve the ashes of his ancestors in her waters. Ganga rushed down from the sky with such terrific force that, had not Civan received her in His matted locks, the whole world would have been plunged into the bowels of the nether regions.

9. i. "would have perished"—the whole human race would have ended with them.

9. ii. A dialogue between a devotee and Sri Raamakrishnaa Paramahamsaa recorded on page 183 of *Gospel of Sri Raamakrishnaa* may be quoted here with great relevancy.

Devotee - "Why has God detained us in this world ?"

Sri Raamakrishnaa : "For the sake of creation. That is His wish, His mayaa. "He has deluded you with the charm of *Kaamini* and *Kaanchanaa* (girls and gold)."

Devotee : "Why has He deluded us like that ? Why has He so wished ?"

Sri Raamakrishnaa : "If He grants Divine Bliss to man, he will no longer remain in the world ; and that means God's creation also will come to an end."

Deathless is He ;
 this cur who sought refuge in Him,
 in the flood of bliss
 He immersed, do note this.

*Note that the holy feet
 which immersed you in the flood of bliss,
 to the devaas high up in the heavens,
 is an exalted thing.*

10*

Oh superb damsel ! What is this penance ?
 Wearing round His neck bones and entrails,
 He is in love with the skeletons on His shoulders!
 Don't you see this ?

*Listen how the skeletons came to be there.
 Note that in order to end the term (of office)
 of the two at the end of an aeon,
 He bore (their skeletons on His shoulders).*

11*

The forest-dwelling tiger's skin is His dress ;
 the skull is His food bowl ;
 the cremation ground His residence ;
 this being so,

who would become slaves unto Him here ?

10. There is something peculiar in this stanza. The lady-in-waiting who had been putting scoffing questions so far, and who does so again from the next stanza onwards, changes her tune in this stanza and says that the Lord immersed her in a flood of bliss. From this, it is evident that the feelings of the lady-in-waiting were no more different from those of the heroine and that she was putting the scoffing questions merely to provoke the heroine into impassioned defence of her Beloved.

11. 'The two' — Brahmaa and Vishnu. According to Maanikka-vaachakar, there were numerous Brahmaas and many Vishnus, (see line 7 of decad 3, and stanza 9 of decad 15), one of each for an aeon, at the end of which they perished with all the rest of the world.

Nevertheless. hear this :

Brahmaa and Vishnu

*and the King of the people of the heavens
are His hereditary devotees.*

12*

What is this which people say
that, with the world as witness,
He espoused before a fire
the mountain King's precious daughter—
the One with the shining forehead,
the Queen of women ?

*Had He failed to espouse Her before a fire
with the world as witness,
all the moral teachings in all the world
would have been confounded.*

13*

What is the secret behind
the Lord of the Hall of Gnosis in Thillai
surrounded by honey-abounding cool fields,
entering the hall and dancing there ?

*Had He not entered the hall and danced there,
note that all the world
would have become a morsel of food
for Kaali with flesh-clinging spear.*

14*

13. 'before a fire'—In the sacramental form of marriage of the Hindus, the marriage vows are taken before a sacred fire round which the bride and bridegroom with linked hands walk seven times to the chant of Vedic verses.

14. The reference to *Kaali* is to a ferocious aspect of *Sakthi* which was out to destroy the world and had begun the Death Dance, when Civan, out of His abounding mercy for the world, joined in the dance, and outwitting and outmatching *Kaali*, put her to shame and subdued her.

Explain to me that I may know the reason why,
 instead of preferring and riding
 the rutting elephant
 or the equine beast or the chariot,
 He preferred the bull and rode on it.

*Note that on the day He burnt
 the three (fortresses) with wide ramparts,
 Vishnu bore Him
 in the guise of a bull.*

15

Did you note that the other day,
 seated under the banyan tree,
 He expertly expounded the code of righteousness—
 the esoteric meaning of the four Vedaas—
 to the Four ?

*Though He expounded the code of righteousness
 that day,
 seated under the banyan tree,
 note that He destroyed the cities three
 to their very foundations.*

16*

16. i. 'The Four'— They are Sanakar, Sanandhanar, Sanathkumaarar and Sanathsujaathar, four hoary sages to whom Civan, in the form of a youthful Dakshinaamoorthy, expounded the four ideals of life by a mere sign, the *Chinmudhraa*, made by joining the tips of the thumb and the index finger of the right hand, leaving the other three fingers stretched. The hand is raised to the level of the chest, palm showing outward.

16. ii. 'The code of righteousness'— see note to stanza 20 of this decad.

16. iii. 'Note that He destroyed'—meaning to say that Civan was not a mere goody goody preceptor but was also a stern maintainer of the righteousness taught by Him.

What is this adoration of someone like us
as a god —
a dancer in public places —
one who wanders about begging for food ?

*Listen to me how even One like us
becomes our Lord.*

*Note that the Four Vedaas themselves,
not comprehending Him,
praised Him as Eesan !*

17*

What is the story behind the gracious bestowal
of the goodly disk —
which slit the body
of the stormy petrel of a Salandaran—
on goodly Naaraayanan on that day ?

*Note that on goodly Naaraayanan
gouging out his eye
and plrcing it as a flower at the feet of Haran,
He bestowed the disc on him.*

18*

His garment is the striped skin (of the tiger) ;
the deadly poison is delicious food (for Him).
Explain to me that I may understand
the craftiness of our Lord in eating it.

*Note that our Lord, whatever He may wear,
and whatever He may eat,
is a Person of a nature*

Who does not know His own greatness.

19*

17. 'Eesan'—Lord of the universe.

18. i. 'gouging out' etc.—see note to stanza 10 of decad 15.

18. ii. 'disc'—a circular saw-like weapon, which along with the conch are the insignia of Vishnu.

Explain to me that I may understand
 His remaining seated under a banyan tree
 and graciously expounding the four ideals of life,
 which begins with Righteousness,
 to the rare austere ones.

*Had He not expounded to the rare austere ones
 the four ideals of life
 beginning with Righteousness,
 the nature of the world
 would not have become clearly known to them. 20**

Thiruchchitrambalam.

20. i. 'The four ideals of life beginning with Righteousness'—They are: Righteousness, the Body Politic, Bliss, and Deliverance (from the cycle of births). The fourth is a result of living up to the first three ideals which are dealt with exhaustively in *The Thirukkural* which is called the Tamil *Vedaa* not out of any chauvinistic notion, but because it is the literal truth.

20. ii. 'to the rare austere ones'—the Four referred to in stanza 16. See note thereto.

20. iii. 'the nature of the world' etc.—Maanikkavaachakar means here exactly what is meant by the 7th verse of the chapter on the Greatness of Ascetics in *The Thirukkural*. It reads: "The world is intelligible only to him who researches into the ways of the five—taste, sight, touch, sound, and smell."

13. THIRUPPOOVALLI

Discarding Matters Emanating from Mayaa

(Sung at Thillai)

Thiruppoovalli is a composite word made up of *Thiru* (holy or sacred), *poo* (flower) and *valli* (creeper). Some commentators would take the last syllable as *alli*, water lily. *Valli* is probably the more appropriate word. It goes well with *poo*, giving *poovalli* a double meaning; the first being 'a creeper bearing flowers or a flower on a creeper', and the second being 'a flower-bearing creeper-like willowy girl'. The second meaning would refer to Civakaami. The straightforward meaning would, however, be "creeper flower". Flowers have been classified in Tamil literature into creeper flowers, tree flowers, water flowers, shrub flowers, and land flowers. For purposes of a dance, plucking the creeper flowers offers great scope for choreography.

In this decad, Civakaami and her companions gather flowers for adoring and adorning her Beloved. The subtitle is *Maayaa-vishayam-neekkuthal*, i.e., removing or extirpating or discarding matter arising from *maayaa*. Please refer to note to stanza 29 of decad 6 in which reference is made to *Maayeyam* (things arising from *maayaa*). These are the various experiences provided by the five senses—smell, taste, sight, touch, and sound. One has to sternly beat down all these experiences under the Cloud of Forgetting. See note to title of sub-decad iii of decad 5./

The phrases “I renounced everyone of the relatives who were my succour” in stanza 1, “severing my bonds of father, mother, relatives and all the rest” in stanza 2 and “throwing dust in the mouth of potent karma” in the 3rd stanza reflect the purport of this subtitle.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

On the Lord placing His identically twin holy feet
on my head,

I renounced and abandoned
the whole lot of relatives who were my succour.

Let us pick the creeper flowers
singing the glory of the raft-like One
Who dances in the hall in Thillai
abounding in dammed waters.

1

Let us pluck the creeper flowers
praising the (tree) hole in lovely Idaimaruthu
where abode the blissful Honey —
the Lord of Paandinaadu —
Who, severing my bonds
of father, mother, relatives,
and all the rest,
assumed lordship over me.

Considering even us who are worse than dogs
as something worthwhile,
our Lord possessed of more tenderness
than a mother,
severing (our chain of) delusive births,
has assumed lordship over us.

Let us throw dust in the mouth of my potent karma
and pluck the creeper flowers.

3

Let us pluck the creeper flowers
singing how Thakkan, who had lost his wisdom,
the Sun-god, Echchan,
the Moon-god and the Fire-god
fell from grace by not praising
the King of cultured Thillai town
and were maimed by Veerapaththirar
of the heaven-based army of demons.

4*

Lord Civan, Who wears on His matted locks
honey-pendant *kondrai* flowers,
came seeking and seeking my body
and entered therein in the presence of the world.
Let us pluck the creeper flowers
for the King of the people of the heavenly land
Who keeps on dancing
while I keep on tottering and tottering about
wailing for Him.

5*

Let us pluck the creeper flowers
singing how He,
Who has three forms and (yet) is incomprehensible,
graciously taking pity on the *devaas*,
obligingly bestowed on them the three fires,
how He graciously knit His holy brows

4. i. 'demons'—Boothaganangal, demoniac-servitors of Civan.

4. ii. Veerapaththirar—a divine warrior created by Civan out of the sacrificial fire for the specific purpose of punishing Thakkan etc.

5. 'keep on wailing'—unaware that He has entered my body.

that three heads may be severed,
and how He burnt the cities three all by Himself. 6*

Let us pluck the creeper flowers
singing effusively of the qualities of our Lord
Who, providing us with a head to bow
(at His feet),
with a mouth to praise
His anklet-girt far-reaching feet,
and with an assembly of His eminent devotees too
for us to mix with,
dances along with His Dame
in the hall in beautiful Thillai. 7

Let us pluck the creeper flowers
praising the qualities of the Lord
Who, making the golden feet
of His eminent devotees the goal for me,
graciously provided a path (thereto) for me
and assumed lordship over me,
and singing how He,

6. i. 'three forms' — *aruvam* (formless), *uruvam* (with form), *aru-uruvam*. (with and without form, i. e. the state of immanence in objects).

6. ii. 'the three fires' — *Aahavaneeyam*, *Kaarukaapathyam* and *Dakshinaagni*. Since *devaas* cannot eat any food other than that offered in sacrificial fires, Civan provided these three types of fires in which sacrifices can be offered to the *devaas*.

6. iii. 'three heads' — the heads of Thakkan, Echchan and Viyaathiran i. e., the principal officiant and two other chief participants in the *yagnyaa* conducted by Thakkan without inviting Civan to it.

6. iv. 'burnt the cities three' — see note to lines 158, 159 of decad 3.

after making us His bonded slaves,
cheated the old karma
which kept tormenting us in full measure. 8

(After) many a day praising Him and serving Him,
the great One, His blossom feet,
In my heart He planted.

Abiding as beauteous flame (therein),
tearing the fibres of my stony heart,
He took me under His sway.
How His anklet-girt twin feet turned into gold,
let us sing and pluck the creeper flowers. 9

Let us pluck the creeper flowers
singing of the cities fought by the Lord—
He of Perunthurai,
the *Kaapaali* Who ate with pleasure
the poison from the darkness-tinged sea—
Who placed on my head
His excellence-abounding feet
that this carcass—
the product of greed—
may cease to be. 10*

The tinkling anklet-girt feet of the Lord—
Who, cooling His (fiery) form,
took possession of my mind
as a transcendently transcendent Being
made of milk, ambrosia and honey—
are the right goal
for those of the world who praise the Lord.

10. i. '*Kaapaali*'—He with the skull in His hand.

10. ii. 'carcass'—body.

Singing the fame of that very goal,
let us pluck the creeper flowers.

11

Let us pluck the creeper flowers
singing of the manner in which
the deadly poison of the great deep sea
became edible food
for Him Who stands in the position of King
to Indraa, Brahmaa, Vishnu,
and the rest of the *devaas*,
but is Himself unassociated
with attributes or symbols.

12

Let us pluck the creeper flowers
singing of the golden pollen
of the *kondrai* flowers
worn by Him of the anklet-girt eternal feet
Who that day under the shade of the banyan tree
expounded the notable Vedaas.
and Whom the heaven-dwellers
and great contemplatives
daily worship steadfastly,
to their heart's content,
for their well being.

13

Let us pluck the creeper flowers
singing how the Lord abiding in Ekambam,
bestowing the likeness of His twin blossom feet
in my mind,
and making it His abode,
nevertheless, dances in the hall
in wide-ramparted Thillai
making it itself His abode.

14

Let us pluck the creeper flowers
 singing the glory of our Lord
 boiling over with rage
 to the destruction of the prestige
 of the Fire-god, the Sun-god, Raavanan,
 Anthakan, Death, red-eyed Vishnu,
 Brahmaa, Indraa, the Moon-god,
 Thakkan of untarnished repute,
 and Echchan.

15*

Let us pluck the creeper flowers
 singing of the Rider of the bull
 doughtly in battle —
 the fierce Lion of the dwellers in Civapuram —
 graciously eating the rice-rolls on earth
 in Madurai,
 and of His being wounded
 when Paandiyan took work from Him
 by taking a stick to His back.

16*

Vishnu, foremost (of the devaas), Brahmaa,
 the heavenly ones and the *Thaanavaas*
 do not (really) know the golden-hued holy feet;
 they merely (know to) praise it.
 (But) let us pluck the creeper flowers
 singing of the many snakes
 which form outstanding ornaments to Him
 Who, entering into my body, has enslaved me.

17*

15. i. 'Anthakan'—a Raakshasaa who was speared by Civan when He was opposed by him in battle in Thirukkovaaloor.

15. ii, 'Thakkan of untarnished repute'—before he made the mistake of conducting a *yagnyaa* without inviting Civan to it.

16. 'eating the rice-rolls'—see story on page 14.

17. '*Thaanavaas*'—the non-devaas, the Raakshasaas.

Let us pluck the creeper flowers
 singing of the great joy
 with which the Lord of Perunthurai
 of chariot-thronging streets
 dances to the delight of the mind of this slave
 who was filled with insatiable longing
 for the reverberating sound
 of the powerful *cilambu*
 on His merit-abounding feet.

18*

Let us pluck the creeper flowers
 singing **how the Lord** of Perunthurai —
 Who, skinning the elephant, dons its hide,
 Who assumes the form of a mad One in this world,
 and (sometimes) that of a child,
 Who is the sole resource for our deliverance,
 Who is the magnificent One of Uththarakosamangai —
entered our intellect.

19*

Let us pluck the creeper flowers
 praising the anklet-girt flower-like feet
 of the Lord of Perunthurai
 Who, displaying His god-like form,
 came riding in state on a horse
 and, graciously entering the city of Madurai,
 became our King,
 and, in His grace, took us into his menial service.

20.

Thiruchchitrambalam

18. ' *cilambu* '—see note to stanza 13 of decad 7. Hearing the sound of the *cilambu* on the feet of Civan is one of the phonic phenomena which contemplatives experience.

19. ' child '—see note to lines 68, 69 of decad 2 in Appendix III.

14. THIRUVUNDHIYAAR

Victory through Gnosis

(Sung at Thillai)

Before we proceed with the note on the title of this decad, we may mention that there is a Caiva Siddhaantha doctrinal work of the same name.

Thiruvundhiyaar is a composite word made up of *Thiru* (sacred), *undhi* and *yaar* (a honorific suffix). *Undhi* requires careful investigation. Commentators dismiss the title as the name of a game played by girls of the past. Sri K. Subrahmaniya Pillai says: "It is possible that *undhi* was a game of keeping some objects like *kazhangu* in the hand and throwing them in the air". *Kazhangu* is a marble-sized nut of a creeper.

May be, there was a game of that name, but it is not in vogue now. The children of Hindu families learn about God and His glory not through catechisms but right from their suckling age to adolescence through stories, songs and games, through witnessing religious festivals and dramas. It is no wonder that there was a game among girls in which the prowess of God was sung. The game was probably a dance. Now let us turn to the dictionary meaning of *undhi*. Thus the dictionary: *undhi* = a collection of male of the species, height, sea, navel, chariot wheel, chariot floor, profession, a pledged article, a whirlpool, area or surface, a girls' game, a component of the *yaazhl* (a stringed musical instrument), the mouth of a river, stomach, river, a narrow section of a river, water,

middle, mound. *Undhuthal* (verbal noun form) = height, rising up (like a helicopter or rocket), climbing or ascending, driving (like driving a car), pushing, flinging, shooting an arrow, etc., sending or despatching, appearing or emerging, twanging the strings of *yaazhl* etc., turning wood on a lathe, tossing the dice, multiplying, going, moving aside (on a seat), departing, fitting into something (like a key in a lock or one half of a die into the other half, etc.).

From this forest of meanings it is indeed difficult to spot the particular one fitting the context of *The Thiruvaachakam* in general and the divine love-drama in particular. In the physical sense, the word should mean standing on the toes of one's feet and jumping or bouncing into the air as one does when trying to reach a low hanging, yet out of reach, flower. Coming after the decad of picking creeper flowers, this would be an appropriate interpretation. In the spiritual sphere, it would again mean a similar, but metaphorical action of striving to reach or grasp something—(the God-head, may we say), elusively out of reach. In both cases, there will be an exultation of the mind which we find echoed in the words of this decad. The refrain that ends each stanza is *undheeparra*, the *parra* standing for 'fly'; the whole phrase meaning "push off with your toes and jump and fly about". The word 'fly' must have been suggested by the suggestive movements of legs, body and arms involved in the act of jumping up to reach something out of reach. I have translated the phrase as "bounce for joy".

Girls' game or spiritual reaching out for the unreachable, this is a decad of sheer exultation.

The sub-title to this decad is *gnaana vettri*. This has been translated as 'Victory through Gnosis'. In an English translation of a French book by Frithjof Schuon, the title appears as *Gnosis* which word is paraphrased as 'divine wisdom'. The translator explains that the term 'gnosis' "keeps its original meaning of Wisdom made up of knowledge and sanctity". He goes on to say: "Many passages in this book...make clear the distinction, often nowadays obliterated, between knowledge acquired by the ordinary discursive mind and the higher knowledge which comes of intuition by the Intellect, the term Intellect having the same sense as in Plotinus or Eckhart."

Therefore 'gnosis' or *gnaanam* is not a product of the intellect. It is a grace received as a result of spiritual discipline and one-pointed contemplation. *Gnaanam* is said to dawn on a person. The person on whom it dawns has it for keeps, provided he continues to live a life of spiritual discipline and one-pointed contemplation. The omnipotence of Civan is the theme of this decad. Through the fate of the various *devaas*, comes the gnosis that Civan is the one and only God, the Almighty. A person is elevated by this gnosis. The victory referred to in the sub-title is the victory over any lingering doubts about Civan being the Godhead.

Out of the 20 stanzas, the first four deal with the burning of the three flying fortresses, the next twelve stanzas and the 18th deal with Civan punishing Thakkan and the *devaas* for conducting a sacrifice without inviting Him to it. The 19th deals with Civan punishing Raavanaa for his impudence in trying to lift the Kailaash mountain. The 17th and 20th stanzas deal with certain acts of grace of Civan.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

Bent was the bow ; broke out the battle ,
wilted the three cities ; bounce for joy !
For the manner they all together burned,
bounce for joy !

1

Two arrows we saw not in Ekamban's hand !
One arrow only—three cities (fell),
bounce for joy !

One also was too many !

Bounce for joy !

2

On the carpentry being completed
and on His placing His foot,
the axle broke.

Singing of this,

bounce for joy !

Ruined were the three cities ;

bounce for joy !

3*

3. When Lord Civan wanted to destroy the three flying fortresses made of gold, silver and iron respectively, entrenched within which, certain *Asuraas* were harassing the *devaas*, the earth was Civan's chariot

In honour of Him, Who,
protecting the three worthy of being redeemed,
could (nevertheless) aim (at the three cities),

bounce for joy !

“ Tender-bosomed One’s Partner ”,

thus saying,

bounce for joy !

4*

While the sacrifice under attack disintegrated,
singing of how the *devaas* ran,

bounce for joy !

Reaching out to Uruththiranaathar,

bounce for joy !

5*

Saying :

“ Hurrah ! Vishnu (in spite of) receiving his share
of the sacrificial offering that day,
did not die ! ”

bounce for joy !

(fashioned by the *devaas*), Brahmaa was the charioteer, Meru, the golden mountain, was His bow, Vishnu was the arrow. The *devaas* were proud of having erected a wonderful chariot, but their pride was humbled when its axle broke on Civan setting His foot on the chariot. See also note to lines 158, 159 of decad 3.

4. It is interesting to note that Civan spared the three *asuraas* (non-*devaas*) while He destroyed their three cities. It was the three flying fortresses which enabled the three *asuraas* to harass the *devaas*. Bereft of them, they were powerless. Civan took them under His service as His door-keepers. Compare with Gandhiji’s oft-repeated statement that he did not hate the British people but hated only their system of government in India.

5. ‘Uruththiranaathar’—Civan, Lord of the Rudhraas. There are said to be 108 of them in each sphere. Over them is Srikanta-Rudhrar. The lord of them all is Civan. It is wrong to confuse Civan—the Godhead—with Rudhraa, one of the Trinity.

Mentioning that he is the father
of the four-faced one (Brahmaa),
bounce for joy!

6

Saying that He severed the torrid Fire-god's hand
which grabbed (the offering) to swallow it,
bounce for joy!

Saying : " Disrupted was the sacrifice ",
bounce for joy!

7

Why should we have any consideration for Thakkan
who broadcast his estrangement with Paarppathi ?
Bounce for joy!

For the Partner of Her of buxom bosom,
bounce for joy!

8

Indraa, becoming a beautiful Kuyil,
on to a tree, he ascended ;
bounce for joy!

Saying :

" And he, the heavenly ones' king !
bounce for joy!

9*

Singing of how the head of Viyaathiranaar fell
in the vengeful wrath-rousing sacrifice,
bounce for joy!

That our continuing birth may cease,
bounce for joy!

10

Singing of the fitting of a ram's head
as a head for Brahmaa, bounce for joy!

With breasts bobbing, bounce for joy!

11

9. 'Kuyil' — a bird similar to a cuckoo. It is noted for its musical call. It is steel blue in colour. Indraa, no less a person than the king of the heavenly ones, changed himself into a kuyil and sought refuge on a tree to escape from the wrath of Civan.

Singing of the gouging of the eyes of the Sun-god
 about to eat (the offering),
 lest he should skulk and run away,
 bounce for joy !

That the seeds of birth of all of us
 may be destroyed,
 bounce for joy !

12

For the cutting of Sarasvathi's nose
 and head of Brahmaa
 and for the grinding under-foot
 of the Moon-god's face,
 bounce for joy !

That our ancient karma may be destroyed,
 bounce for joy !

13*

Singing of the felling of Brahmaa
 and the Officiant at the sacrifice,
 bounce for joy !

And of Indraa searching for an exit,
 bounce for joy !

14

Singing of the driving of the Sun-god's teeth
 down his pink throat,
 bounce for joy !

Singing that the sacrifice was thrown
 into confusion,
 bounce for joy !

15

Honourable Thakkan that very day lost his head ;
 standing around Thakkan's children,
 bounce for joy !

13. i. 'ancient karma' — *Sanchita Karma* ; see note to line 20 of decad 1 in Appendix III.

13. ii. 'Sarasvathi' — goddess of learning and spouse of Brahmaa.

“Saying : Died the (fire of the) sacrifice ! ”,
bounce for joy!

16*

For Him of beautiful matted locks
Who, that day, bestowed the sea of milk on the babe,
bounce for joy!

For the Father of Kumaran, bounce for joy! 17*

Saying that the head of the Hon. Four-faced One
seated on the goodly lotus
was severed in a trice,
bounce for joy!

Saying : “ Severed it was by the finger-nail ”,
bounce for joy!

18

16. i. ‘Honourable’ — is used in an ironical sense.

16. ii. ‘standing around Thakkan’s children’ — Presumably, some of the children participating in the game were assigned the roles of Indraa, Sun, Thakkan, his children, etc.

17. i. ‘bestowed the sea of milk on the babe’ — this phrase refers to an act of grace of Civan who created the sea of milk for the sake of a child — later sage Upamanyar — who was wailing for milk as there was none in his father Viyaagraapaadhar’s house.

17. ii. ‘Kumaran’, also called “Murugan”, is an aspect of Civan (called in legends and poems as the Son of Civan). He is said to have been produced by six sparks emanating from the six faces of Civan and coalescing into a foetus. Civan, whose five faces only are referred to in Thiruvaachakam (line 20, decad 2) has another called *Adhomukam* i.e., the downward looking face. This is referred to in *Kandhar Kalivenbaa* by Kumaraguruparar who describes in detail in that poem the esoteric purport of the projection of this aspect of Civan. Kaalidaasa’s work, *Kumaara Sambavam*, in Sanskrit relates the birth of Kumaran in poetic flights of imagination.

In modern times, Murugan is also called *Subrahmanyam* a corrupt form of *Su-Brahmaneyam* which means the pure or sacred aspect of Brahman. Kumaran means son or youth, Murugan means the handsome youth.

Singing how the twice five heads of him—
 who, parking his chariot
 (at the foot of the mountain)
 tried to lift the mountain—snapped,
 bounce for joy!

Saying his twenty (arms) too snapped,
 bounce for joy!

19

Saying : “ He is the Guardian in the sky
 lest the mantled sages be destroyed ”,
 bounce for joy!

Saying : “ He is Guardian for regions beyond that too”,
 bounce for joy!

20

15. THIRUTHTHOLNOKKAM

Prapancha Suddhi

(Sung at Thillai)

Thiruththolnokkam is a composite word made up of *Thiru* (holy or sacred), *thol* (shoulders) and *nokkam* (staring at or gazing on), i. e. “ The Sacred Decad of Gazing on the Shoulders ”. The meaning of this title has been elaborately discussed on pages 42, 51 and 52. This decad has only 14 stanzas.

19. ‘ Him, who, parking his chariot ’ etc. — Raavanaa.

20. ‘ destroyed ’ — by the fiery heat of the sun. The sages referred to are a specially benevolent group of sages who keep circling in the sky like modern satellites in an unceasing watch over the earth. *Thirumurugaattruppadaï*’s second poem describes Murugan as holding aloft one hand to protect the same sages for the same reason.

The subtitle is *Prapancha-suddhi*. *Prapancham* means the inanimate and animate world. When the letter 'm' in the word is dropped, the word means 'of *prapancham*'. *Suddhi* means purity or purification. Sri. M. V. Nellaiappa Pillai explains the phrases thus: "Since God, out of the great mercy He has for inanimate and animate beings of the world, permeates them in a non-dual manner, they shed the quality of *malam* which is mingled with them and become pure. Sri Dhandapaani Dhesikar says that the Agaththiya Sootraas and an old annotation say that this decad is about *prapancha suāddhi* and its meaning is 'purifying the soul'.

In concluding my comments on this decad at page 64, I said: "Thus every true lover of God has to publicly proclaim his love so that his passion may be purified and transformed into passionless passion." At that time, I wrote these words all unknowingly and without having in mind the subtitle to this decad and its significance and appropriateness. 'Passion' and *paasam* (meaning the three *malams*) are interchangeable words in this context. I feel that I have been divinely guided in offering an interpretation of this decad.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

Oh Dancer Who dances the divine dance
in the hall in resplendent Thillai !
You prevented me
from becoming a foolish-natured person
who attempts to scoop water from a mirage,

taking it to be verily water
 in a flower-abounding pond.
 That I may merge in your feet,
 let me dance
 gazing on Your shoulders.

1

Oh damsels with dense luxuriant tresses,
 let us dance the game of shoulder-gazing,
 singing the praises of the qualities of Him Who enslaved us
 that we may not sink (into hell)
 and ever keep shuttling between birth and death,
 the praises of Him of the dance hall
 in undiminishing-splendour—invested Thillai,
 the praises of Him not possible of being seen by Brahmaa
 or him who brought down the wood apples
 with a calf.

2*

Let us dance staring at the shoulders of Civan
 and sing how the hunter in love with God,
 with sandal-clad venerable feet (as hands),
 mouth as water pot, and flesh as food-offering,
 conducted a service making it resemble
 an orthodox service
 with prescribed paraphernalia,
 and, (duly) receiving grace
 that his greatness may be known,
 stood (in the Lord's presence) with rejoicing heart.

3*

2. 'him who brought down the wood apples' etc.—Vishnu. This phrase refers to an exploit of Krishna who was an incarnation of Vishnu. The calf was an ogre in disguise.

3. 'the hunter in love with God'—Kannappan. For story, please see note to stanza 4 of decad 10 in Appendix III.

Let us dance staring at the shoulders of Civan
and sing how He, like one actuated by mercy
to make my stone-like heart thaw and melt,
graciously entered my heart
and guided me to the right path
with all the world as witness,
and has thus laid Himself open
to criticism.

4

Let us, gazing at Civan's shoulders, dance on
singing how He stood mingled
in eight several ways
with earth, water, fire, wind,
the far-stretching sky, the moon, the sun,
and the soul endowed with intelligence,
and how He all by Himself became many
such as the seven worlds and the ten cardinal points. 5*

Let us dance the game of shoulder-gazing
by the grace of our Father
Who, while several foolish religionists
like Buddhists and others
flounder in their respective religions,
makes my mind Civan-imbued
and transforms whatever I do into *thavam* —
an act of consecration unto God.

6*

5. 'ten cardinal points' —In addition to the eight lateral cardinal points like North, North-east, etc., two more points such as sky-wards and down-wards are mentioned in literature and religious rites such as *dik-bandhanam* i. e., protecting a place of worship at all the ten points by sprinkling sanctified water to the accompaniment of certain special *mantraas*. Theosophists call this 'tyling' the Lodge.

6. '*thavam*'—though it is rendered here as "an act of consecration unto God", yet it is very much more than this. In translating a

Let us dance gazing on the shoulders of our Lord
 and sing how,
 on the sinless celibate
 cutting off both the feet of him—
 a brahmin too by caste and his own father—
 who defiled a service unto Civan,
 the sinful deed, by the grace of Eesan,
 acquired purity
 while the *devaas* stood round adoring the boy. 7*

Pride we have lost, wisdom we have forgot,
 Oh goodly maidens !
 We think but of the anklet-girt far-reaching feet of Him—
 Lord of the South—Whom heaven adores.
 The rapturous Dancer's grace
 if we, His slaves, obtain,
 forthwith in rapture lost,
 we shall dance gazing on His shoulders. 8

Since the time the Raakshasaas, three in number,
 escaping from the fire,
 stood at the door step
 of our Father—He with an eye in the forehead—

chapter of *The Thirukkural* with this word as its title, I said in a note that there is no single word in English for *thavam* and that it means austerities, self-mortification, non-attachment, meditation, and contemplation. I would begin it today as follows: "It means charity in the heart towards all creatures", and "austerities, self-mortification" etc., will follow. If I had to select one word for *thavam* in English, I would choose "contemplation". *Thavam* is a single word to describe the life of a contemplative, a seeker of God. It condenses into itself all the qualifications laid down in the thirteen chapters in *The Thirukkural* on Asceticism.

7, i. 'sinless celibate'—see note in Appendix III.

7. ii. 'service'—a performance of religious worship.

note that countless Indraas,
 numerous Brahmaas and many Vishnus
 have died in the world above.
 Let us dance gazing on Civan's shoulders.

9*

Let us dance gazing on the shoulders of Civan
 and praise everywhere
 how Sankaran, our Lord,
 graciously bestowed the disc on Vishnu
 on his gouging his eye
 and placing it on Haran's rosy feet
 when one thousand lotuses
 went short of one flower.

10*

Let us dance gazing on the shoulders of Civan,
 singing how He performed lustrations
 by the sacrifice of the body of Cupid,
 the life of the God of death,
 the teeth of the scorching Sun-god,
 the nose of the Daughter of the tongue,

9. i. 'Since the time the Raakshasaas'—Thaarakaakshan, Vidhyutmaali and Kamalaakshan, the lords of the three flying fortresses of iron, silver and gold. The Puraanaas say that when Vishnu preached atheism to the Raakshasaas, these three refused to accept the teachings and stood steadfast in the worship of Civan. Also see note to stanza 4 of decad 14.

9. ii. 'countless Indraas'—Please see Appendix I — "Postscript to *Thiruvaachakam*", postscript II

10. i. This stanza refers to an incident relating to Vishnu worshipping Civan with a thousand lotuses, one for each of His thousand names which Vishnu chanted during the worship. Sankaran and Haran are names of Civan.

10. ii. 'disc'—a circular saw-like weapon which along with the conch are special insignia of Vishnu.

head of Brahmaa,
the arm of the Fire-god,
the aspects of the Moon,
and heads of Thakkan
and Echchan.

11*

Let us dance gazing on the shoulders of Civan,
singing how, **making the turbulence**
of the two called Brahmaa and Vishnu —
who out of their folly were each claiming :
“I am the transcendent One”,
“No, I am the transcendent One” —
subside,

Haran, in the shape of a pillar of fire,
stood there (before them),
surpassing the bounds of space,
as the real transcendent One.

12

I, foolish servitor,
all the long while,
watered the wasteland
instead of serving
the transcendently transcendent One.
Let us dance gazing on the shoulders of Civan,
singing how the goodly Gem,

11. i. ‘lustration’ — an act of purification.

11. ii. ‘Daughter of the tongue’ — Sarasvathi, the goddess of learning, born from the tongue of Brahmaa.

11. iii. ‘aspects of the Moon’ — the moon is said to have sixteen aspects — presentations, called *Kalai* in Tamil.

11. iv. This stanza relates the many acts of *marrak-k-karunai*, i.e., acts of grace which seemingly look like harsh and cruel acts. Compare with stanza 4 of decad 12.

imperishable since aeons past,
came and pulled out the tap-root of my birth.

13

Let us sing
of the ineffable Inner Light —
the most eminent One —
coming and entering my mind,
of (my) crossing (thereupon)
the shoreless vast sea of desire,
of the headlong flight of the craving senses —
the vultures —
robbed of their prey,
and of the destruction of their eyrie (my mind) too ;
let us sing of these
and dance gazing on the shoulders of Civan.

14*

Thiruchchitrambalam

16. THIRUPPONOOSAL

Purification by Grace

(Sung at Uththarakosamangai)

Thirupponoosal is a compound word made of *Thiru* (sacred), *pon* (gold, golden), and *oosal* (swing). The Sacred Decad of the Golden Swing. The heroine, seated along with her companions on a golden swing erected in an arbour or private garden, swings with ecstasy. As they swing, they sing of the glory of their

14. 'Of the destruction of their eyrie (my mind) too'—This line may be translated like this also :

"Of the subsidence of the commotion (in my mind too)"
gaining support from line 6 of decad 1.

Lord—Civan. The sub-title 'Purification by Grace' is self-explanatory. Every stanza of this decad is imbued with the atmosphere of grace. This decad has only nine stanzas.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

Ascending the beautiful golden plank
 which has lovely coral as struts
 and (strung) pearls as ropes,
 and seated gracefully thereon,
 let us, Oh maidens with lance-like smiting eyes,
 swing singing of the gracious twin feet
 of the unsatiating Ambrosia of Uththarakosamangai
 Who graciously bestows on us, cur-like devotees,
 His morning fresh blossom feet—
 not known to Naaraayanan—
 as home-town for us.

1*

Oh pedigree peacock-resembling damsels
 with gait like that of swans !
 Let us swing on the golden swing,
 singing of Idaimaruthu
 where abides the King of Uththarakosamangai—
 He with three shining eyes—
 Whose never-ageing honey-filled
 ambrosia-exuding
 sweet-tasting blossom feet—
 never beheld even by the heaven-dwelling *devaas* —

1. Uththarakosamangai is the capital of Civan (line 120 of decad 2)
 and His feet are the home-town for His devotees.

abide in my flesh and melt it,
whereby I become clear (of all doubts and fears). 2

Oh damsels with breasts decked with jewels
of high grade gold !
Let us swing on the golden swing,
singing of the lightning playing around
turretted huge mansions
in Uththarakosamangai of the Gem—
He with neither the antecedent end nor beginning—
Who, while the concourse of sages
and several hundred crores of heavenly ones
were waiting,
graciously bestowed on me
His sacred ash
and took root (in my heart)
that I might be eternally established
in His flood of grace. 3*

Poison-sedimented throat has He ;
Lord of the heavenly ones is He ;
from Uththarakosamangai's cloud-capped gem-like mansion
He will come with Her whose words are music,
and in His slave's heart take abode :
Elixir of deathlessness will well up in our hearts,
as He, in His grace,
sunders the bonds of death and birth.
Let us His holy praises sing,

3. ' antecedent end '—end antecedent to the beginning. According to Caiva Siddhaantaa, it was from *antham* (*eeru* in Tamil) that the world emerged. So *eeru* or *antham* or end was antecedent to 'beginning' or creation.

Oh ye who wear rows of bracelets white,
and swing on the golden swing. !

4

Oh damsels with beautiful breasts
adorned with jewels !

Let us swing on the golden swing,
singing of the qualities
of Uththarakosamangai's Dancer
with the curved crescent moon on His head —
the God unknown by the two
as to whether He is male or neuter or female —
Who graciously ate the poison as food
so that the concourse of *devaas*
may be redeemed from being disgraced.

5*

'Oh damsels with bejewelled breasts
on which flower garlands swing !
Let us swing on the golden swing,
singing with love exuding in us
about the rings dancing on the ears
of Him with a part of His body ruled by a Dame —
Uththarakosamangai's Lord of matted locks
glittering with *kondrai* flower's pollen —
Who, honouring this cur out of all His devotees,
will sever the chain of my births
that I may flourish without the evils
of all my former births
getting the upper hand over me.

6

Oh damsels with gold-like breasts decked with jewels !
Let us swing on the golden swing

like dancing beautiful peacocks riding on the swan,
singing of the beauty of my Father —

Who enslaved even me —

the great inconceivable Mystery

established resplendently in holy Uththarakosamangai,

Who severs the shackles of sin

on our repeating His praises

and humbly entreating Him.

7*

With our bodies thrilling and our hearts melting,

Oh damsels, let us swing on the golden swing,

singing, to our heart's content,

of Him Who came down from lovely (Himaalayaa)
mountain top,

of Him Who ate heartily of the food

(provided on earth by the old woman in Madurai),

of Him Who rode the deep seas

(to redeem Paarvathi born as a fishermaid),

of Him Who for the uplift of the world

came mounted on a horse (in Madurai)

and enslaved us,

of Him unavailable to Vishnu,

of Him in holy Uththarakosamangai

where righteousness reigns resplendently.

8

Oh damsels with bobbing breasts

adorned with dazzling jewels !

Let us swing on the golden swing

praising the qualities

of Him with the matted locks

adorned by fragrance laden *kondrai* flowers.

7. 'riding on the swan'—Swings used to be shaped like swans.
Some of these may be seen even today in Gujarat.

of Him Who, along with the Dame nestling on His side,
 came graciously and accepted our services
 so that the unique form of the Effulgence
 abiding in Thiru-uththarakosamangai
 surrounded by cocoanut groves
 may sever our chain of births
 and enslave even people of our sort.

9

Thiruchchitrambalam

17. ANNAI-P-PATHTHU

The Soul Becoming Perfect

(Sung at Thillai)

Annai-p-paththu means 'Decad of the Mother'. The significance of this decad has been explained on page 65. The sub-title to this decad is *Aatma Poornam*. *Aatma* means 'of the soul'; *poornam* means 'wholeness' 'fullness'. The soul has reached a state of maturity, of perfectness, which entitles it to unite with the Lord. In another sense, the soul is full to overflowing with love of the Lord. The Secret Courtship part of the divine love-play ends with this decad. The bride of the Lord, bursting with pent-up love, babbles to her mother, in incoherent terms, the form and fame of the Divine Lover Who has stolen her heart.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

"The Vedaas-reciting One, the white ash-covered One,
 the rosy-hued One,
 He with the cosmic sound-emitting drum,
 Oh mother!" she would say:
 "He with the cosmic sound-emitting drum,

to the four-faced One and to Vishnu,
Lord is He, Oh mother !”

1*

“Mascara-tinted eyes has He,
Sea of Mercy is He,
abiding in me, He is melting (my heart),
Oh mother !” she would say :

“Abiding inside me and melting me,
never-drying up tears of bliss
He causes in me,
Oh mother !” she would say.

2

My eternal Bridegroom is He,
exceedingly beautiful is He,
He is ever in my thoughts,
Oh my mother !”, she would say :
“He who abides in my thoughts
is the Southerner,
the Father in Perunthurai, Bliss incarnate,
Oh mother !”, she would say.

3

“The swaying snake is His ornament,
His dress is a pelt,
sacred ash-smeared is He; this is the manner of His guise,
Oh mother !”, she would say.
“Looking on and looking on the manner of His guise,
my mind pines,
Oh my mother, why is this ?”
she would say.

“Long arms has He,
dense growth of hair has He,

1. i. ‘Vedaas-reciting One’ — Civan. See also stanza 1 of decad 12.

1. ii. ‘four-faced One’ — Brahmaa.

He belongs to the goodly Paandinaadu,

Oh my mother! ", she would say :

" He of goodly Paandinaadu
will enslave my wayward mind
and make love to me,

Oh my mother! ", she would say.

5

" He of Uththaramangai
of inconceivable splendour,
He resides in my heart,

Oh my mother! ", she would say :

That He resides in my heart,
Brahmaa and Vishnu have not found out ;
what a wonder is this ?

Oh my mother! ", she would say.

6

" White robed is He,
white (with the sacred ash) is His holy forehead,
monastic cape-wearer is He,

Oh my mother! ", she would say :

" The monastic cape-Wearer
mounted on a galloping charger
steals my heart,

Oh my mother! ", she would say.

7

" *Thaali* and *arugu* He wears,
sandal paste He favours,
He will make us His slaves,

Oh my mother! ", she would say :

" The Saintly One Who will make us His slaves,
in His hand He has the cymbals,
what does this mean ?

Oh my mother! ", she would say.

8*

8. ' *Thaali* and *arugu* '—see note to line 201 of decad 4.

“ A Dame is a part of Him,
 (yet) ascetic guise He wears,
 He has come abegging,
 Oh my mother !”, she would say :
 “ On the departure of Him Who had come abegging,
 my heart grieves ;
 why is this ?
 Oh my mother !”, she would say. 9

“ The *kondrai* flowers and the crescent moon,
 the *vilva* leaves and the *datura* flower ;
 His head is thickly adorned with these,
 Oh my mother !”, she would say :
 “ Verily it is that *datura* on that thickly adorned head
 which is the cause of craziness in me today,
 Oh my mother !”, she would say. 10*

Thiruchchitrambalam

18. KUYIRRPATHTHU

Soul's Yearning

(Sung at Thillai)

Kuyirrpalthu means the Decad of the Kuyil. The Kuyil is a bird, similar to the cuckoo. It is of a steel blue colour. It is a spring season bird which frequents the mango groves. The bird can rarely be seen, but its sweet call often changing into a melodious warble can be heard from quite far. In love-poetry, the kuyil is sent as a messenger of love by a love-lorn maid.

10. i. ‘*vilva* leaves’—bael, *aegle marmelos*.

10. ii. ‘*datura*’—it has strongly narcotic properties.

Civakaami sends the kuyil to invite her lover to her house (see page 53). The sub-title needs no explanation. All the stanzas of the decad make it clear.

In stanza 2, there is a reference to Vandothari, A note has been given to that stanza in that connection. I would like however to air my speculation on the meaning and origin of that name. It is a proper name, the name of Raavana's consort. The name as it appears here—Vandothari—is, in all probability a corruption of Vandamarothi—Vandu-amar-othi—meaning 'the Dame with tresses on which bees are seated'. St. Thirugnaanasambandar sings thus of the feet of Civan in the 8th stanza of the *Panchaakshara Pathikam* :

“Vanadamarothi penina ;

Pandai Yiraavaanan paadi uinthana.”

which means :

The feet cherished by Vandamarothi ;

the feet which, on being praised by Raavana

in days of yore,

redeemed him.

It seems inapt to imagine, as one commentator does, that this name in St. Thirugnaanasambandar's poem, refers to Uma. The context, the reference to Raavana, cries aloud against that. In the context of the juxtaposition of the two lines, St. Thirugnaanasambandar cannot but be referring to Raavana's consort, whom Maanikkavaachakar calls Vandothari and Vaalmeeki calls Mandothari. Many a Tamil name has got corrupted in the passage from Tamil to Sanskrit, for instance, *Amsol-ambikai* (The Mother of beautiful

words), has got corrupted to Anjalaambikai (The Mother who says 'fear not'. Similarly the name of a sacred town, Thiru-p-pazhanam, (the Holy Town of Groves) has got transformed into Thiru-p-payanam (The Town of Sacred Pilgrimage)!

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

Oh Kuyil of sweet song, listen !
 Our Lord's two feet,
 if you ask me about them,
 they are far beyond the nether regions seven.
 The effulgent gem-set crown, were I to speak of it,
 is of an antiquity beyond reach of words.
 Beginning or attributes He has none ;
 end He has not. Bid Him come (here). 1

Oh Kuyil ! Go and call with your superb voice
 Him of South Paandinaadu—
 the Lord who abides in Perunthurai,
 the Arche-type of all forms (in the world)—
 Who with all the resplendent seven worlds
 praising Him,
 bestowed bliss, out of His great grace,
 on beautiful Vandothari. 2*

2. 'bestowed bliss on Vandothari'—The story goes that, once upon a time, when Civan was expounding the *Aagamaas* to a group of 100 sages in Thiru-uththarakosamangai, He left them to bestow grace on Vandothari, the consort of Raavana, and, according to her request, transformed Himself into an infant in her presence so that she could fondle Him. This incident is referred to again in verse 5 of decad 43. No mention is made of this incident in any of the thousands of songs of Sambandar or Appar or Sundarar.

Oh Kuyil of steel blue form !
 Go and invite my Beloved
 Who resides for the enlightenment of the world
 in highly virtuous sweet Uththarakosamangai
 resplendent with gem-set tall mansions
 and the temple in which
 the creeper-like (sinuous) Dame
 aglow in a beautiful form abides.

3

Oh Kuyil small that does frequent
 the grove with honey-sweet fruit !
 Do listen to this :

The bounteous Lord Who, spurning the heavens,
 entered this earth and made man His own,
 the only One Who, disregarding the flesh,
 entered my heart and my sentient life became,
 the Bridegroom of Her

Who won Him with gentle eyes that excel the fawn's,
 do bid Him come hither.

4

Oh beautiful delightful Kuyil !

Bid the Knight come here—

the One Who is the beginning, the middle
 and the end,

the One with the vermilion-red feet
 not known by the Trinity,

the One Who, resembling a sun surrounded by rays,
 descended from interstellar space.

that He may eradicate the desires of His devotees. 5*

5. i. 'the Trinity'—Brahmaa, Vishnu and Rudhraa.

5. ii. 'a sun surrounded by rays'—God descended from heaven along
 with His band of devotees and appeared as a *Guru* at Thirupperunthurai.
 (Continued on next page).

Who, that day, while Vishnu and Brahmaa,
 abandoning their search for Him,
 stood plunged deep in thought,
 pierced through the sky,
 shot up as a bright (pillar of) fire,
 and, rising higher and reaching and passing beyond
 the heavenly spheres,
 stood as a wide-spread flame.

8

Oh fragrant grove haunting Kuyil
 with hue shining like black gold !
 Go and invite my Treasure
 with form which excels (in hue) the superb red lotus —
 the Ambrosia with hue surpassing beautiful gold
 of rare quality,

Who, showing me here on earth His feet,
 severed my bonds (of *malam*) and enslaved me —
 to go here.

9

Oh Kuyil in the big grove
 abounding in clusters of flowers !
 Do listen to this !
 Invite Him of lovely hue like ruddy fire
 Who, turning into a Brahmin and coming here,
 showed His beautiful rosy feet to me,
 and, saying : " This man here is Our man ",
 graciously enslaved even me.

10

19. THIRUTHTHASAANGAM

The Manner of Enslavement

(Sung at Thillai)

Thiruththasaangam is a composite word made up of *Thiru* (sacred or holy), *thasa* (corruption of the word *dhasa*, meaning ten), and *angam* (literally, limbs, but, in the present context, features or insignia). In the case of a King, these are: (1) his name and titles, (2) his country (3) his capital, (4) the principal river of his country, (5) the principal mountain of his country, (6) his steed, (7) his special weapon, (8) his special drum, (9) his garland (10) his flag. A word has to be said about the garland. Each of the three principal kings of ancient Tamilnaadu, and several of the Chieftains too, had their own special flower. They wore on all occasions a garland made of such flowers. Apart from this, there were garlands of specific flowers for specific occasions. Thus :

garland of *vetchi*, when going on a cattle raid,
garland of *vanchi*, when going on an invasion,
garland of *ulingai*, when laying a siege,
garland of *thumbai*, when declaring war,
garland of *vaahai*, when celebrating victory.*

This decad is placed in a setting of love-sick Civakaami asking her parrot to announce her Lover. The stanzas are in two parts—the first part being a

* ‘*vetchi*’—scarlet ixora, *ixora coccinea*; *vanchi*—common rattan of South India, *calamus rotang*; ‘*ulingai*’—a common wayside weed, *Jaerua lanata*, more probably, balloon vine, *cardio spermum halicaca bum*; ‘*thumbai*’—white dead nettles, *leucas*; *vaahai*—*sirissa*.

question put by Civakaami to the parrot and the second part being its answer. The first stanza shows, however, that Civakaami put the question and answered it herself even before the parrot could reply. Her heart and mind were so filled with thoughts of her Lover that she anticipated the parrot with the answer.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

Parrot fair and young !

Recollect and tell the renowned sacred name
of our King of Perunthurai :

‘ Aarooran, Semperumaan ’ ;

or, as you have heard Brahmaa and Vishnu say :

‘ Our Lord ! Our Lord of the gods ! ’

1

Oh Emerald of faultless sweet speech !

The Lord of the seven worlds,

He Who has lordship over us—

tell me His country.

Know for certain that the South Paandinaadu

is ever the country of Him,

*Who, accepting their love, bestows on His devotees
the blessing of no return*

(to the cycle of births).

2*

Oh Polly in the flower garden

in which pollen swirls about in the air !

Which is the city where resides

He Who rules over us —

He with one side of His body under a woman's sway ?

2. ‘ Emerald ’—Emerald-coloured parrot.

*His city is Uththarakosamangai
which all devotees praise
and herald as verily Civapuram
on earth.*

3

Oh Darling with red beak and green wings !
Tell me the (name of the) river
of the Lord of our mind —
He who abides in Perunthurai.

*Oh damsel ! Note that our Owner's river
is the renowned bliss
which plunges down on earth from heaven
to wash away the impurity of our minds.*

4

Oh beautiful Parrot with beak like the *kinjuka* flower !
Think well and tell me the mountain
where abides the Cloud —
the King of decayless Perunthurai.

*Note it is that Mountain
which, wielding the sword (of gnosis)
that the darkness in our heart may depart,
graciously bestows on us bliss-laden deliverance.*

5*

Come here and tell me ;
do not go back to your cage, Oh my Parrot !
What is the mount
of Him of unequalled splendour ?

5. i. ' *kinjuka* flower' — see note to lines 15, 16 of decad 2

5. ii. 'Cloud' — compare with line 95 of decad 3.

5. iii. Compare the answer in this stanza with line 16 of decad 1 and line 124 of decad 2. No specific mountain on earth seems to be indicated in all these three references.

*With divine damsels who ever entertain honeyed thoughts
singing His praises,
He rides with delight
the horse of gnosis.*

6*

Oh Polly of tree-honey-like sweet speech !
Tell me the weapon
with which the infallible King of Perunthurai
conquers His enemies.

*Note that the weapon He wields
is the trident which darts upon the three malams
that those who beseech Him
may not be tainted by the malams
and that their hearts may melt.*

7*

Oh Polly with speech like sweet milk !
Tell me the drum
which booms in the presence of our King
of Perunthurai.

*It is the drum
which emits booming cosmic sound
rising out of supreme bliss
that the enemy called birth
may be confounded by the grace of God.*

8*

Oh Polly of well chosen words !
What is the true garland of the Lord of Perunthurai
Who abides with devotees
whose mouth waters (with expectation of bliss) ?

6 'horse of gnosis' - this rendering follows the commentary of Kaazhi-Thaandavaraayar.

7. 'tree-honey' - bees build their honeycombs on inaccessible tips of the limbs of trees, on hill faces, in caves, under the eaves of houses or even in the ruins of buildings. Of all these, the honey from the combs on trees is held to be of the best quality.

*The garland woven of thaali and arugu
is the garland preferred by Him
Who owns me, a cur, as His slave
that evil karma may at no time approach me.*

9*

*Oh green Parrot of the grove!
Tell me the shapely flag
of the King of Perunthurai of pure waters.
It is the faultless bull-embroidered flag
which is seen high above displaying its beauty,
and striking His enemies with great terror.*

10*

Thiruchchitrambalam

20. THIRUPPALLIEZHUCHCHI

The Withdrawal of the Veil

(Sung at Thirupperunthurai)

Thiruppalliezhuchchi is a composite word made up of *Thiru* (sacred) *palli* (bed standing for sleep) and *ezhuchchi* (waking up). The esoteric meaning of this decad has been given on pages 67, 68 under the title "He is Arisen in Me". If ever any further elucidation is required, the sub-title supplies it. It is

9. i. Putting the questions is a poetic device. The answers are given by Civakaami herself. The answer in this stanza makes it quite clear.

9. ii. 'true garland'—since people say that He wears at times the garland of *kendrai* flowers or that of *kazhuneer* flowers, or that of *mandhaara* flowers, or even that of bones and entrails, Civakaami wants to know the true garland.

9. iii 'thaali and arugu'—see note to line 201 of decad 4.

10. 'pure waters'—sacred waters.

Thirothaana Suddhi, meaning, literally, Concealment, purification of. Sri M. V. Nellaiappa Pillai explains *thirothaanam* as an act of grace of God by which He hides Reality from the soul so that it can gain the experience provided by good and bad karma in the world. When the soul is mature enough, God withdraws the veil concealing Reality. This is the significance of the *visvaroopā darshan* given by the *Moorthi* in temples early in the morning. This decad is the 14th decad in the series of 16 decads beginning with the 7th decad—*The Thiruvempaavai*—which, in my opinion, form a unitary whole dealing with the birth, growth, and consummation of Passionless Passion towards God resulting in the apprehension of the Godhead. This decad brings the bride to the threshold of the nuptial chamber. She crosses the threshold in the next decad and in the 22nd decad, the last of the series of 16 decads which form the third hypothetical part of *The Thiruvaachakam*, she is in the arms of her Beloved—the marriage is consummated.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam.

Obeisance to You,
 Oh eternal Being—the Principal of my life !
 It has dawned.
 Strewing on Your blossom feet blossoms
 befitting them,
 and receiving the gracious beautiful smile
 which blossoms for us on Your holy face,
 we will worship Your sacred feet.

Beautiful kuyils are calling,
 cocks are crowing,
 other birds are chirping,
 conches are sounding,
 dimmed are the brilliant stars,
 the light of dawn is increasing ;
 Oh God, lovingly show us
 Your anklet-gripping goodly twin feet.
 Oh Lord Civan abiding in Thiruperunthurai !
 Oh Lord unknowable by anyone,
 yet easily accessible to us !
 Oh our Lord ! Do graciously rise (in my heart). 3

Sweet music-producing Veenaists
 and harpists stand on one side of You ;
 chanters of *ric* and hymns on one side ;
 closely woven garland-bearers on one side ;
 worshippers, weepers, and wilting persons on one side ;
 and people with palms joined over their heads on one side.
 Oh Lord Civan Who abides in Thiruperunthurai !
 Oh our Lord Who, enslaving even me,
 bestows sweet grace !
 Do graciously rise (in my heart). 4*

Apart from learned people saying
 that You exist in every element,
 apart from their saying
 that You have neither going nor coming,

4. i. 'Veenaists'—players on the *veenaa*, a term coined on the analogy of violin, violinist ; harp, harpist.

4. ii. '*ric*'—Rig Vedaa's verses.

4. iii. '*hymns*'—Tamil hymns.

and making a song and dance of it, .
 we have neither known nor heard of anyone
 who has seen or known You.
 Oh King of Thirupperunthurai of cool fields !
 You are beyond conception even by the mind.

Oh our Lord

Who, coming before us,
 and, ridding us of our faults,
 graciously enslaves us !

Do, in Your grace, rise (in my heart).

5

Your devotees, who, abandoning all activities
 and casting off their bonds,
 in freedom dwell,

and everlastingly perceive You in themselves,
 they all have come as maidens fair
 with beauteous dark eyes
 and worship You in the manner of human beings.

Oh Bridegroom of the awe-inspiring goddess !

Oh Lord Civan Who abides in Thirupperunthurai
 surrounded by cool fields where blossom pink lotuses !

Our own Lord Who, severing this (chain of) birth,
 enslaves us

and bestows grace on us !

Do, in Your grace, rise (in my heart).

6

That It is the savour of fruit,
 that It is ambrosia,
 that It can rarely be known,
 yet is so easy of access,
 even the Immortals know not.

Oh Dweller

in Uththarokosamangai's honey-exuding groves

Who has assumed sway over us
 and has, in Your grace, come hither,
 that we may declare,
 "This is His sacred form, this here is He"!
 How would You like us to serve You?
 That we shall pay heed to.
 Our mighty Lord!
 Do, in Your grace, rise (in my heart). 7*
 You are the antecedent beginning, middle and end.
 The Trinity even know You not.
 Who else could know?
 Oh transcendent Being
 Who, along with Her of ball-caressing fingers,
 graciously steps into the ancient huts
 of Your devotees!
 Showing me Your ruddy fire resembling form,
 showing me also the Thirupperunthurai temple
 in which You abide,
 and showing me how You transform Yourself
 into a Brahmin,
 You came and enslaved me.
 Oh unsatiating Ambrosia!
 Do rise, in Your grace (in my heart), 8*

7. 'It'—God; the 'Tat' in '*Tat Tvam asi*'. This stanza is an exposition of this Vedic *mahaavaakyam* (great utterance).

8. i. 'antecedent beginning'—Civan preceding Brahmaa who was created by Civan. Civan is the creator of the creator.

8. ii. 'middle and end'—protector and destroyer.

8. iii. 'Trinity'—Brahmaa, Vishnu and Rudhran.

8. iv. 'ball carressing fingers'—exceedingly soft fingers which strike the ball made of flowers used in a sort of game like badminton.

8. v. 'ancient huts'—bodies.

Oh superb Being Whom even the devaas of heaven
cannot approach !

Oh You Who, coming down on earth (as a *Guru*),
made us, Your band of servitors, flourish here !

Oh You Who abide in fertile Thirupperunthurai !

Oh Honey Which abiding in the eyes of us —

Your hereditary devotees —
gives us delight !

Oh Ambrosia of the sea ! Oh Sugarcane !

Oh You Who abide in the thoughts
of Your loving devotees !

Oh You Who are life to the world !

Oh our great Lord !

Do, in Your grace, rise (in my heart).

9

Oh Lord Who abides in Thirupperunthurai !

Since he who is Vishnu longs for You,
and the flower-seated one yearns for You,

saying : “ Our days in vain we spend here
without going down to earth

and being born there (as human beings),
seeing that (life on) earth is the means

whereby Civan chooses one for redemption ”,

Your exuberant true Mercy and You

can be relied upon to enter the earth
and enslave us.

Oh unsatiating Ambrosia !

(Do, in Your grace, rise (in my heart),

10*

21 KOIL-MOOTHTHA-THIRUPPATHIKAM

Anaadhiyaana / Sat-Kaaryam

(Sung at Thillai)

Koil-mootha-thiruppathikam is a composite word made up of *Koil* (temple in general, and Thillai, modern Chidhambaram, in particular), *mooththa* (elder, earlier or superior), *thiru* (holy or sacred), *pathikam* (decad). One commentator would have us believe that this decad is given this name as it is superior (in quality) to the next decad which is called *Koil-thiruppathikam*. Apart from this being a rather naive interpretation, to say that this decad is superior to the next decad is repugnant to the idea of a ladder like spiritual growth of the soul which begins at the lowest rung in the 7th decad and ends on the top rung or, rather, on the pinnacle, which is the 22nd decad — the *Koil-thiruppathikam*, the last song of which is the very apex of the pinnacle from where the soul will soar to the land of no return. It is appropriate to interpret the title of the decad as a decad which is a prelude to the *Koil-thiruppathikam*. The admission to the galaxy of devotees (see line 43 of decad 1 and stanza 1 of this decad, and also pages 70 to 73) is the prelude to the consummation of passionless passion and the death of the self. Thus “mooththa” will acquire a prosaic but apt meaning of earlier or prior.

The sub-title is *Anaadhi-aana-sat-kaaryam* (beginningless, that is, eternal, true event or incident). Sri Dhandapaani Dhesikar says that an old commentary explains this sub-title as the true account of Sakthi and

Civan graciously bestowing the method which means deliverance to a soul. The words of that old commentary are: *Sakthiyum Civanum oithu irupaal urra mukthi aahum muraimai aruliya unmai*. [The true account of Sakthi and Civan with mutual agreement standing on either side (of the soul) and graciously bestowing on it the method of gaining deliverance (from birth)]. Does this refer to the mystic five letters *Ci-vaa-ya-na-ma* in which *ya* represents the soul, *vaa* standing before *ya* represents the grace of Civan and *na* standing after *ya* represents *Civa-sakthi*? This fancy of mine is born from the 10th verse of decad 38 quoted on page 11. But, perhaps, the old commentary merely means to say that the method of gaining deliverance is to gain the preliminary privilege of admission to the galaxy of devotees which admission itself is, according to Caiva Siddhaantaa, the acme of Civan's grace, i. e. deliverance itself.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

Oh our Primal Lord Whose being knows no end,
and Who dwells in the sacred golden hall !
The Mistress dwells in midmost of You,
within the Mistress, centered You dwell :
If in the core of me, Your servant,
both of You indeed dwell,
come forward and bestow on me, Your servant,
the gracious privilege
of abiding amidst Your servants
that my heart's purpose may be fulfilled.

You took the initiative and enslaved me formerly;
 I too, trying to justify the same,
 have stayed behind and am doing Your bidding.
 But, Oh mighty Lord, I have fallen behind.
 If You do not tarry for me
 and, with (surging) grace,
 do not say: "Come along",
 won't Your devotees ask of You:
 "Who is this fellow?"

Oh You Who delights to dance in the golden hall! 2

Oh You who are delighted by loving servitude!
 If I—unappreciative fellow of unmelting heart—
 were to complain with the world as witness,
 won't they say that it is unworthy of You?

Oh You Who exist for the sole purpose
 that those, who, performing sacrifices,
 have come up the path to You, may flourish!
 If You do not bestow on me the vision
 of Your face,

I will perish,

Oh our entire Principal of the golden hall! 3*

Oh my entire Principal! Oh guiding Principle
 to my five senses,
 to the three (mind, intellect and ego)—
 and to my soul!

Oh Primal Being Who is accompanied
 by the throng of Your sky-crowding ancient devotees!
 Other than weeping with worry
 whether You would take pity

3. 'sacrifices'—'thavam'. See note to stanza 6 of decad 15.

to bestow grace on me and abide in me,
what else can I do,

Oh King of the golden hall ?

4

Calling on You as :

“ Oh King ! Oh Ambrosia Who dances in the golden hall ! ”

and looking forward yearningly to Your grace
night and day

like the crane seeking its prey, I am wearied.

If You give vision of Yourself

to the extraordinary delight

of the devotees who reach the shores (of Your feet),

and remain mute in my case,

like ghee in milk set for curdling,

will not people revile You ?

5

They will keep abusing You ;

all the rest will keep gossiping

that I am Your slave ;

and I will keep cultivating Your grace only.

Oh Effulgence ! Oh Eesaa !

Oh my Father dancing in the golden hall !

Will you not relent at least now

to permit me to worship the sacred Presence

of You surrounded by Your devotees ?

6*

Devising a rare device, You (formerly) enslaved me.

Would I now become an ownerless bull ?

Oh our very Life !

Do graciously **bid me come** —

me who remain frustrated here hoping against hope

that the Dancer in the hall at Thillai

will take pity on me —

6. ‘ cultivate ’—to seek to gain or foster.

that I may approach the place where
 You and the devotees crowding round You
 abide and sport about exuberantly.

7*

Oh Gold ! Oh Dancer in the golden hall
 Who, esteeming me as a thing of worth,
 entered my heart and enslaved me !

If You discard me
 without bestowing grace on me,
 who is there here (on earth)
 to tell me, Your slave, "Do not fear" ?
 If You do not say : "Come", to me—
 who having parted from You,
 pine here with confusion-filled mind,
 and if You do not show me
 Your band of enlightened devotees,
 would not people laugh
 if I happen to die (of a broken heart) ?

8

(Your band of enlightened devotees)
 will laugh, exult, smack their lips
 as if they were tasting honey ;
 gathering and gathering in groups,
 they will expatiate on Your sacred sayings ,
 or listen to them or praise them,
 and, remaining singly and singly,
 they will meditate on Your name.
 In their presence,
 Oh our Chief Who dances in the golden hall,
 shall I remain a despicable dog ?

7. 'Devising a rare device'—refers to the Lord subjecting Maanikkavaachakar to many trials and tribulations in the court of the Paandiyan King.

Oh my Hope! Won't You bestow Your grace on me
at least now? 9

Oh Lord Who owns me!

Do take pity and bestow grace on this soul
which, firmly believing

that our Lord will not fail to bestow grace on it,
languishes here babbling Your name —

with eyes streaming tears,

with mouth mumbling Your praises;

and with obeisant mind melting

with thinking of You—

and contemplating You,

and calling on You again again,

“Oh (Lord of the) Golden hall.” 10

Thiruchchitrabalam

22. KOIL THIRUPPATHIKAM

Characteristics of Experience

(Sung at Thillai)

Koil-thiruppathikam is a composite word made up of *koil* (temple in general, and Thillai, as here, in particular), *thiru* (sacred), and *pathikam* (decad). The Sacred Decad of Thillai. It is significant that the decad as well as the previous decad were sung at Thillai. I have said on page 89 that the vision vouchsafed to Maanikkavaachakar at Thillai (see decad 31) was in fulfilment of the promise held out in Thirupperunthurai (see lines 127, 128 of decad 2). The fulfilment was

actually in two stages. Decad 31 describes the second and final stage, the stage preliminary to the extirpation of desire as a prelude to the conferment of *videha mukthi* — the disembodiment of the soul and its merging in Civan. The first stage is the conferment of the *jeevan-mukthaa* state—the apprehension of the Godhead, the mystical union in which “God and man while remaining, no doubt, metaphysically distinct, are practically and experimentally ‘one spirit’”. (I have dealt with this point at great length on pages 73 to 80.)

The subtitle too has been extensively explained by the long quotation from Thomas Merton on pages 75 to 79 and by the lines 163 to 182 of the 3rd decad reproduced on page 81. In the words of Thomas Merton, “you are not you, you are fruition. If you like, you do not have an experience, YOU BECOME EXPERIENCE.” How Maanikkavaachakar became experience is (the theme of this decad) which is wonderfully condensed in the last stanza in these words :

What You gave is Yourself;

What You took is me.

The third part of the four hypothetical parts into which I divide *The Thiruvaachakam* ends with this decad. So too ends The Way of Enlightenment. With the next decad, Maanikkavaachakar enters the Unitive Way — the road to *videha-mukthi*.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

Oh transcendent Effulgence which rises in my mind
and, closing the outlets of the crafty five senses
which, at cross purposes with me, delude me,
makes ambrosia well up in me !

Oh refined Honey ! Oh great Lord Civan !
Oh Civan who abides in Thirupperunthurai !
Oh Bliss which transcends the joy
of every one of the endless states of being !
Oh my Love !

Do graciously come
that I may see You as You truly are !

1*

You bestowed on me a grace undeserved by me
and enabled this slave's body and soul
to joyfully thaw and melt with love.
For this I have nothing to give in requital to You,
Oh Emancipator pervading the past,
the future and every thing !
Oh infinite primal Being !
Oh Lord of Perunthurai in the south !
Oh great Lord Civan !
Oh King of eminent Civapuram !

2

1. i. Meditate on the significance of the words, "that I may see You as You truly are."

1. ii. 'Oh Bliss.....endless states of being'—The original text reads : '*Eeru ilaa-p-padhangal yaavaiyum kadantha inbame*'. In these six words, Maanikkavaachakar has condensed the 8th *Anuvaaka* of the 2nd *Valli* of The *Talithiriya Upanishad* which attempts to describe *Brahmaanandam*—The Bliss arising from apprehension of Brahman—the Godhead — in a mathematical progression of comparisons with other kinds of joy experienced in various states of being.

Oh King of devotees !

Oh Father of this slave !

Oh Flame of Reality

Which, making my body and soul

soften in every pore and melt,

has entered me,

and, abiding in me,

has dispelled the darkness of unreality !

Oh eternal waveless clear Sea of ambrosia !

Oh Civan Who abides in Thirupperunthurai !

Oh Experience Which is experienced

by becoming established in a state

transcending speech and sensation !

Instruct me how I may describe You to others.

3*

Oh Being impossible of being experienced

by great experienced sages,

the heavenly ones and the rest !

Oh peerless One ! Oh Life to all living beings !

Oh our Medicine Which severs me from (bonds of) birth !

Oh pure Ether manifest in dense darkness !

Oh Civan Who abides in Thirupperunthurai !

Oh Bliss without attributes !

What do I lack henceforth,

I, who have reached You ?

4*

3. 'sensation'—awareness by the senses generally.

4. 'Ether'—modern critics would like to change the word *Veli* (ether) in the original to *voli* (light). But the ether referred to here corresponds to the 'space' mentioned in the Chaandogya Upanishad; (see note to line 35 of decad 1). It is what is called *Chithaakaasam* (the ether in the mind). The word 'Ether' stands here for the Godhead contained therein.

Oh ullageless Fullness ! Oh dregsless Ambrosia !
 Oh infinite Hill of incandescent flame !
 Oh King Who has taken root in my mind,
 coming as the Vedaas and the Content of the Vedaas !
 Oh Civan abiding in Thirupperunthurai
 Who rushes into my mind like an unstemmed flood !
 Oh my Lord, You have taken abode in my body !
 What more shall I, henceforth, beg of You ? 5*
 Oh Effulgence which rises in my mind
 as I beg and beg (for your grace)
 and melt (with yearning) !
 Oh Lord with lotus red feet
 which shine on the heads of *devaas* !
 Oh Civan Who abides in Thirupperunthurai !
 Oh Lord Who,
 becoming a form composed of
 all-pervasive ether, water,
 earth, fire and wind, and, yet, none of these,
 later vanished (into those five elements) !
 Having seen You with my eyes today,
 I exult in it ! 6*
 This day, out of grace to me,
 You rise in my heart like a sun,
 dispelling the darkness therein.
 On this Your manifested nature
 I thought till all (volitional) thinking ceased to be.

5. i. ullageless'—ullage—loss by evaporation or leakage.

6. 'Oh Lord vanished?'—This passage refers to Civan assuming a human form (the Brahmin *guru*) with flesh and bones, blood, breath, heat and life and later vanishing into thin air. The body is said to be composed of the five elements — flesh and bones being made of earth, blood of water, breath of wind, heat of fire, and life of ether.

Oh Civan Who dwells in Thirupperunthurai,
 Whose *None-but-Youness* goes forth
 goes forth into all things
 as atom by infinitesimal atom
 till You alone are !
 No particular thing You are,
 You apart none are !
 Who can indeed know You ?

7

Oh Expanse of diffusive light,
 which, sprouting as the earth,
 the worlds of rank and the entire universe,
 pervades (over all of them) !

Oh Fire latent in water !
 Oh Ninmalaa impossible of conception !
 Oh Honey appearing in my mind
 exalted by the flood of Your grace !

Oh Effulgence Who transforms me into Bliss (incarnate),
 who are kin to me here,
 who are strangers ?

8

8. i. 'the worlds of rank' — The worlds of Indraa, Vishnu and Brahmaa to which our poet refers in the 2nd stanza of the 5th decad. It is a belief in Hinduism that worthy souls, which, however, are not yet mature enough for deliverance from the cycle of births and for merging in the Godhead, are given the enjoyment of the ranks of Indraa, Vishnu or Brahmaa for a certain period before being born on earth. (see note to stanza 2 of decad 5)

8. ii. 'Fire latent in water' — refer to lines 22 to 26 of decad 3 and lines 137 to 141 of decad 4. The theory is that God created the earth with the properties of all the five elements- viz., earth, water, fire, wind and ether, with, however, a preponderance of firmness or hardness, the property of earth. The next to be created was water from which the preponderant quality of earth, i.e. hardness, was dropped. The third to be created was fire from which the preponderant quality of earth and water were dropped and so on. Thus fire is said to be latent in water.

Oh Form which appears as Effulgence !
Oh formless unique One !
Oh ineffable Beginning, Middle and End !
Oh great Sea of Bliss which severs my bonds !
Oh Hill of evil-free goodness-endowed sacred grace !
Oh Civan Who abides in Thirupperunthurai !
Do come, and, bestowing on me Your twin feet,
graciously show me by what means I may go unto You. 9

You gave Yourself to me and took me in exchange ;

Oh Sankara,

Who, indeed, is the cleverer one of us two ?

Infinite bliss I gained,

what did You gain from me?

Oh Mighty Lord Who has occupied my mind
as Your shrine.

Oh Civan who abides in Tirupperunthurai,

Oh my Father, Oh Lord of the Universe,

my body you have taken as Your abode ;

for this I have nothing to offer in return.

10

Thiruchchitrambalam

9. 'evil-free goodness' — Thiruvalluvar also speaks of *purai theerndha nanmai* — flawless good, (verse 292). Normally, there is no unmixed good just as there is no unmixed evil. In mundane affairs, what is good for someone must, of necessity, produce a reciprocal evil to someone else. What the two saints of Tamilnadu mean is unalloyed goodness.

23. CETHTHILAAPPATHTHU

Immeasurability of Bliss

(Sung at Thirupperunthurai)

Ceththilaappaththu is a composite word made up of *Ceththu* (dying), *ilaa* (not) and *paththu* (decad). The Decad of 'I Am Not Yet Dead'. I have dealt with the place and purport of this decad on pages 83, 84. I have nothing more to add.

The subtitle is "Immeasurability of Bliss." In the last verse of the previous decad, Maanikkavaachakar sings: "Infinite bliss I gained". This subtitle is a natural sequence of that declaration. But how do the ten stanzas of this decad reflect the subtitle?

The last line of the previous decad ends with the words:

"For this I have nothing to offer in return."

There is another decad—rather a sub-decad—which speaks of rendering something in return for a favour received. It is the 5th sub-decad of decad 5, *The Thiruchchathakam*. The sub-decad which follows, i. e. the 6th sub-decad, expresses a longing to die, a longing to shed the body. In verses 53 & 54, the desire is expressed in positive terms, and in verses 52, 55 and 56, the same desire is expressed equally strongly but in different terms. The decad now under consideration follows the same pattern of longing for death following an overwhelming sense of indebtedness, an indebtedness which cannot be cleared by a good deed in return. It is by

this overwhelming sense of indebtedness that we are able to assess the immeasurability of the bliss bestowed on Maanikkavaachakar, and to which he gives expression in the question "Infinite bliss I gained, what did you gain from me (in return)?"

The Decad

Thiruchchitrāmbalam

Even after I, bogus one, have parted
 from your anklet-girt new blossom-like twin feet
 Which, had entered me,
 softening my mind, and had made ambrosia well up in it,
 I, crafty one, am not yet dead.
 Alas! Even when wide awake,
 I have lost the objective of my mind.
 Oh Sire! Oh King!
 Oh great Sea of grace! Oh Father!
 Oh Lord of rosy hue,
 Who could not be known by Brahmaa or Vishnu!
 I know not what to do,
 Oh Civan abiding in Thirupperunthurai! 1*

Overgrown with anthill and trees
 (while they stood or sat in contemplation),
 with water and air (only) for food,
 dwellers in the (heavenly) spheres and others
 have withered seeking You.
 Oh King, Whose blossom feet none of them have seen!
 You mesmerised me with one word and caught me.

1. In the concluding stanza of the last decad, Maanikkavaachakar sings: "Oh mighty Lord Who has taken my mind as Your shrine!" He now bemoans the loss of the image of the Lord in his mind.

(For this act of grace), I do not tremble,
 my mind does not melt over much,
 nevertheless, I do not die ;
 I do not kill this undying body ;
 I still keep roaming here,
 Oh Civan who abides in Tirupperunthurai !

2*

Oh Rider on the bull !
 Considering even this outcaste
 as something of worth,
 You bestowed Your grace on me.
 On Your doing so, I exulted and walked on my head.
 Oh Sankaraa !
 Oh Mainstay of all the numberless heavenly ones !
 Oh eternal One. Who ate the poison
 from the billowy waters !
 Oh Archer Who burnt the cities of the intransigent ones !
 Do will me to die,
 Oh Civan Who abides in Thirupperunthurai !

3

While many like those, who becoming Your devotees,
 are engaged in rare austerities,
 or like Brahmaa and Vishnu,
 or like those who,
 with bones melting like wax fallen into fire,
 contemplate You,
 are waiting, why did You enslave me here ?
 Like hard *paraai* wood is my mind,
 like tree-knots are my eyes,
 my ears are harder than iron,
 Oh Lord of Paraaiththurai in the south !

2. 'one word' = the mystic five-letter word, na-ma-ci-vaa-ya.

Oh Lord of the Land of Bliss !

Oh Civan Who abides in Thirupperunthurai !

4

Disregarding the decrees of the *devaas*

(of the five senses)

who sway a person,

and hailing You with love, " Oh Sire ! ",

I will stay on the path shown by Your grace.

Oh Being Whom even the gods on earth—

the ascetics—cannot approach !

Oh my Beloved, showing me the grace

which is never absent from You,

and, Oh my Lord, showing me

Your anklet-girt twin feet,

do, in Your grace, rid me of this delusive body,

Oh Lord of the lords of the actuating *devaas*,

Oh Civan Who abides in Thirupperunthurai !

5

4. i. '*paraai*'—a kind of tree once abundant in a place eleven miles from Tiruchirapalli. For that reason that place is called Paraaiththurai.

4. ii. 'like tree-knots are my eyes'—see note to stanza 21 *decad* 5.

5. i. This is a stanza which has taxed the learning and the ingenuity of the commentators. The phrases which baffle them are *aattuththevar*, *naattuththevar* and *settaiththevar*. I have consulted the works of six commentators, and none of them agree on what these phrases signify. If I were to give here the interpretations of each of them, I would be wasting space and the time of readers besides confusing them. After careful study of the commentaries and after taking into consideration the working of the mind of Maanikkavaachakar as revealed in the hundreds of stanzas in this work, I have interpreted the phrases as follows : *aattuththevar*=presiding deities over the five senses which sway a person ; *naattuththevar*=ascetics ; *settaiththevar*=Lord of the lords of the actuating *devaas*. For further elucidation, see Appendix III.

5. ii. 'the path shown by Your grace'—corresponds to 'The path of falsehood-free conduct of Him' referred to in verse 7 of *The Thirukkural*.

Cut I have not, my body into pieces ;
 enter the fire and stay there, I do not ;
 the ways of Your grace I know not ;
 endure I cannot, this body ;
 a place to go to, I do not see ;
 Obeisance, obeisance to You,
 Oh my Rider on the warlike bull !
 I do not die ;
 separated from You,
 what shall I do to sweetly survive ?
 Do, in Your grace, tell me "Do this",
 Oh Civan Who abides in Thirupperunthurai
 surrounded by fields fed by water
 held between bunds.

6

Oh Illusionist !
 Oh heavenly One Who ate the poison from the sea !
 Oh Ambrosia with sapphire-hued throat !
 I, a cur, do not even think of You.
 Even though I am a wretch
 who do not bow at Your feet,
 saying : "Oh Namachchivaaya !",
 show me the highway to You.
 O Pinggaka
 of crescent moon-abiding matted locks !
 Is it seemly that I should be a remote one to You,
 Oh Civan Who abides in Thirupperunthurai ?
 While the flower seated Brahmaa
 and he who lies on the raging sea (Vishnu)
 and Indraa and others wait,

7*

7. 'Illusionist' — by reason of the Lord assuming many forms
 and performing many miracles, the poet calls Him 'Illusionists'.

do cleanse me of my faults
and, showing Your tinkling anklet-girt feet,
say: "Take these as your goal",
and add me to Your band of devotees.

I have been wondering what to do,

Oh my Medicine !

Does this slave being in trouble please You,
Oh Civan Who abides in Thirupperunthurai
surrounded by fields filled with cool water ?

8

While the (eminent people of the) world,
Indraa, Brahmaa and the heavenly ones were waiting,
You preferred me and enslaved me with pleasure,
Oh You with anklet-girt blossom Feet
Which took the dear life of Death !

Oh Bearer of Ganga !

Oh You with hand on which fire rests !

Do command wooden-eyed me also

to come to the same blossom (feet)

for which Vishnu too wails loudly,

Oh Civan abiding in Thirupperunthurai

surrounded by fields in which the *sel*-fish

and the blue lotus flourish.

9*

Even after diving into and storing and drinking
the waters of the great sea of grace of You

Who, taking pity on me and coming (as a *guru*),
graciously said: "Poor fellow",

and rid me of the fear (of perdition),

my heart does not melt,

Oh Civan Who abides in Thirupperunthurai !

Oh heavenly One Whom
 he who holds the disc in his hand
 and he on the flower do not know !
 Oh You Who have the Hill-maid
 on one part of Your body !
 Since pride preponderates over all other feelings in me,
 I am sore distressed,
 Oh Sea which abides
 in the great Kailash mountain !

10

Thiruchchitrambalam

24. ADAIKKALAPPATHTHU

Assessing Ripeness for Deliverance

(Sung at Thirupperunthurai)

Adaikkalappaththu is a composite word made up of *Adaikkalam* (refuge) and *paththu* (decad). The primary meaning assigned in the dictionary to the word *adaikkalam* is "the person who has taken refuge", It is in this sense that the word is used in this decad. Hence, it has been translated as 'protege' i, e. one under the protection or patronage of another. This is the Decad of Taking Refuge in God.

The last stanza of the previous decad mentions a certain distress. It is this distress which makes Maanikkavaachakar remind God that he is His protege. The reader will recollect that we said on page 83 that the *Jeevan-mukthaa* lives with a dread for companion. It is this dread which Maanikkavaachakar refers to in

the stanza of the previous decad and it is this same dread which drives him to seek refuge in God and remind Him that he is His protege.

As regards the sub-title which, in Tamil reads : *Pakkuva-ninnayam*, *pakkuva* is a contraction of *pakkuvaththin* or *pakkuvaththinudaya* i. e. 'of *pakkuvam*', *Pakkuvam* is apparently derived from a North Indian, probably Sanskrit, word, *paknaa* i. e. to ripen, to mature. That this is the correct interpretation, is evidenced by the words "ripe-minded devotees" which Maanikkavaachakar uses in the very first stanza of this decad. *Pakkuvam*, therefore, means ripeness or state of maturity. *Ninnayam* is a Tamil form of *nirnayam*, a Sanskrit word. It means 'making sure' or 'assessing'. Therefore I have translated the subtitle as "Assessment of Ripeness". Ripeness for what? The answer could not be anything but 'for deliverance'. I must confess that we have to search laboriously for the connection between the subtitle and the contents of the decad. We, probably, find the connection in the adjectives and attributes used to describe the true devotees of the Lord in stanzas 1, 4 and 9. By a negative process, we may assume that the words in which Maanikkavaachakar describes himself in this decad create a picture of what a ripe person should not be like. We should not forget that this ripeness is for nothing less than eternally merging in the Godhead.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

Ripe-minded devotees
 who, like luxuriant bunch of lotuses,
 had clustered round Your rosy feet
 and gained peace,
 all of them have that very instant gone
 (to heaven).

This worm-infested contemptible-bodied sinner
 lacking in education and wisdom,
 this serf with a foul tainted mind,
 Oh Owner, is Your protege !

1

Oh You, Who, in Your magnanimity,
 put up with the meanness of me
 who does detestable things only !
 Oh You Who wear the serpents !
 Oh You Who contain the surging Ganga
 in Your matted hair !
 Oh You Who, through Your holy grace,
 sever my birth by its roots !
 Oh Owner ! This serf is your protege.

2

Oh great great Lord !
 Oh great Lord,
 Who, severing the roots of my birth,
 gives me god-madness !
 Oh great artful Lord !
 Oh great Lord Who comes into my mind !
 Oh rare to be beheld great Lord
 Who stood revealed

1- 'tainted'-by the odour of experiences in past lives.

without Brahmaa and Vishnu knowing You !
Oh Owner ! This devotee is Your protege !

3

Those devotees, who taking hold of the raft —
Your anklet-girt feet —
entered the torrent of the pouring rain of sorrow,
have ascended to heaven.

I, caught in the whirlpool of the sea of sorrow,
battered by the waves called women,
and attacked by the shark called lust,
am perishing.

Oh my Owner ! This slave is Your protege !

4

Caught in the wiles of women with curly tresses,
and forgetting Your prowess, I am wearied
of remaining here in this ignorance-breeding body.
Oh Partner of Her with collyrium-painted wide eyes
and glances like those of a frightened deer !
Oh great Lord of the heavenly ones !
Do bestow grace on me !
Oh Owner, this slave is Your protege !

5

Like curd which cracks and spreads
to the sides of the jar
on maidens with collyrium-tinted eyes
which resemble a split tender mango
plunging the hard churn into it,
I have collapsed.

Hallowed be Your eminent blossom feet !
When am I to come up to them
Oh Father, Oh Sea (of mercy),
and on what day shall I-

potent karma-ridden one—
 :worship them ?

Oh Owner ! This slave is Your protege ! 6

Oh beautiful-eyed One Who, graciously **entering me**—
 who, caught in the net of petulance of women
 with lightning-like glances and willowy waists,
 was tossing about in misery—

that I may no longer so toss about,
 and Who, welling up as ambrosia in me
 and tasting sweet, **takes pity** on me for my sins !

Oh my Owner ! This slave is Your protege ! 7

Oh Partner of Her with eyes
 like split surface of tender mango !

Call me unto Your blossom feet
 or thrust me into hell ;

Your will I do not know.

My mind shuttles about covertly (between desires)
 like the (weaver's) shuttle between the warp.

Alas ! I will be ruined !

Oh Owner ! This slave is Your protege. 8

Devotees who do not know separation from Your grace
 have come unto Your tinkling anklet-gripping
 gracious twin feet

and have received a treasure
 which never knows recession.

I do not know any method of worshipping You !

I do not know You at all !

I do not know the knowledge
 by which I could know You !

Oh Owner ! This slave is Your protege. 9

For the sake of You Who bestow it,
 I scoop up Your grace-filled ambrosia and gulp it :
 But I, karma-ridden one, choke on it
 on account of my not being destined to receive it.
 Give me rare honey-like gurgling water to drink,
 and save me.

I am suffering, Oh my Owner !
 This slave is Your protege !

10

Thiruchchitrambalam

25. AASAIPPATHTHU

Characteristics of a (Ripe) Soul

(Sung at Thirupperunthurai)

Aasaippaththu is a composite word made up of *aasai* (longing) and *paththu* (decad). This is a Decad of Longing, a longing which melts our hearts and brings tears to our eyes.

The meaning of the sub-title is evident in every stanza, nay, in every word of each stanza, and in the pathetic refrain, "I long for".

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

Oh uncut Gem Who enslaved me here,
 bestowing on me the treasure
 called Your anklet-girt rosy feet

10. i. 'For the sake of You'—out of regard for You.

10. ii. 'gulp'—as if it were some bitter thing.

which he of the garuda flag could not see !

Note, Oh Ammaan, that I long to receive
Your grace which will dispel my darkness.
and for You to hail me from there :

“ Come hither ”.

1

Oh my King ! I cannot remain confined
in this garment of brain and bones
tied together by closely wound thongs
of white sinews
and covered by skin ;
do call me unto You.

Oh my delicious Ambrosia
beyond (reach of) people of whatever sort !

Oh my Father !

Note that I long to see You, Oh my Ammaan !

2

To the end that this pus-exuding, fly-infested,
dirt-overlaid, walking little dwelling (of my soul)
may be destroyed, call me unto You, Oh my King !

Oh Dancer ! Oh Gem of a *guru*,

Whose role is to guard me
and assume lordship over me !

Oh God ! Oh unobtainable One to the *devaas* !

1. (i) ‘garuda’ — the bird which serves both as a mount and as a flag emblem for Vishnu. Chamber’s Dictionary defines the word as ‘a Hindu demi-god, part man, part bird’. But this is not how the Hindus conceive it. To them, it is something like the roc of Sindbad the Sailor’s stories, a bird of great size and might sanctified by being the mount of Vishnu. Common people class the bird with one variety of kite with a white patch under its throat. On auspicious occasions, there are many persons who will not take their food unless they have seen this bird circling in the sky overhead.

1. (ii) ‘Ammaan’ — beauteous great One.

Oh Civan !

I long for You to look at my face a little
and say : " Ha ! Come hither ! ".

Take note of this, Oh Ammaan !

3

With this graceless walking hall
chock-full of bones, filth, and dirty exudations
tormenting me continuously, I grieve.

Oh our great Lord, prostrations to You !

Note, Oh Ammaan, that I long

(for my hard heart) to crack, thaw and melt
and, seeking Your inner light (of grace),

I long to reach Your holy blossom feet
and abide there.

4

In my body of pulpy putrid interior
and skin-covered exterior,

I resembled a tamarind fruit.

Even so, Oh Rider on the bull,

Oh sacred ash-bathed One,

Oh my delicious Ambrosia,

Who, coming readily, enslaves me,

Oh Ammaan, note that I long to be considered by You
a person worthy of pity.

5*

I, a cur, am wearied ;

I cannot tarry any longer here.

Oh Lord with flowery rosy feet

5. 'I resembled a tamarind fruit'—when the tamarind fruit is fully ripe, its pulpy interior shrinks and detaches itself from the pod, but not entirely. It still clings to the pod by some of the stringy fibres of the pulp. Our poet means to say that he had still some lingering attachment to the world. The phrase, *irunthum*, in the original, means, "even so" or "nevertheless".

not known by the heavenly ones !

You placed me in this life ; (now) take me back.

Oh free One! Note that I long very much to look upon
the lustre of Your face

and to see the gleam of Your smile !

6

Oh transcendent One ! Oh transcendent Effulgence

Whom those on earth and those in the sky praise
and adore !

Oh You Who come,

and, bestowing on me the world of no return,

Enslave me, do come !

Oh unsatiating Ambrosia ! Oh Ammaan !

Note that I long to wander about

singing Your thousand names

and to hail You

“ Oh Our great Lord ! ”.

7

Oh Ammaan ! Oh King of Aiyaaru ! Oh Sire !

Note that, resembling wax fallen into fire,

I long to worship You

embracing Your anklet-girt rosy feet

tightly with my arms

and untiringly keeping them on my head,

and to cry out with my mouth :

“ Oh our great Lord ! Oh our great Lord ! ”.

8

Oh transcendentally transcendent Being

without a peer ! Oh Ammaan !

Note that I, Your slave,

long to cast off this stinking body

with all its faculties,

and, after entering the City of Bliss

and meeting You, the divine Effulgence,
 I long to see
 the galaxy of Your ancient devotees
 to the delight of my eyes.

9

Caught in the net of petulance of women
 with desire-raising eyes like those of a *sel* fish,
 I, a cur, am sore bruised.

Oh Flame of gnosis! I do not see any help.
 Oh You Who are a part of Her with feet
 touched up by the cotton swab of red colour!
 Note that I long for You to tell me
 with Your coral-red holy lips: "Fear not!"

10

Thiruchchitrambalam

26. ATHICAYAPPATHTHU

The Characteristics of Deliverance

(Sung at Thirupperunthurai)

Athicayappaththu is a composite word made up of *Athicaya* and *paththu*. *Paththu* means a decad. I consider that the Tamil word *athicayam* is a corruption of the Sanskrit word *adhrisyam* in which the syllable 'a' is a negative prefix meaning non or not. *Dhrisyam* means something visible or seen. The overall meaning is "something not seen before".

I am aware of Sri C. K. Subrahmaniya Mudaliaar's interpretations of the words *athicayam* and *adhbhutham*. He says : that *athicayam* is the feeling of exultation on experiencing something, knowing what it is, and that *arrputham* (corruption of the Sanskrit word *adhbhutham*) is the feeling of exultation on experiencing something,

not knowing what it is. In support of these interpretations, he points out that Maanikkavaachakar says: '*Kandaame* (we saw), in the case of *athicayam*, and, that in the case of *arrputham*, he says: "we do not know".

Sri Dhandapaani Dhesikar, on the other hand, quoting Hemchander and the *Amaram* says that the word *athicayam* means superiority or greatness or great rank or status.

I feel, however, that in the context of this decad and in the context of the word's position in the last line of each stanza and its juxtaposition with the word *Kandaame* - we saw - the interpretation submitted by me is the more plausible one. When St. Thirunaavukkarasar sings "*Kandarriyaathana kanden, kanden avar thiruppaadham*, (i. e. 'I saw things which have never before been known to have been seen, I saw His only feet'), he uses the Tamil equivalent of *athicayam* viz., *Kandarriyaathana*, and leaves us in no doubt about the meaning of the Tamil word *athicayam*. I submit that Maanikkavaachakar too uses the word in the sense of *Kandarriyaathana*.

Athicayam, therefore, is best translated as a "mystic event" or "mystery". 'Mystic' means, "involving a sacred or secret meaning hidden from the eyes of the ordinary person, only revealed to a spiritually minded person".

The subtitle has reference to Maanikkavaachakar's admission into the galaxy of devotees, which event, as I have stated on page 72, is "deliverance here and hereafter".

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

We witnessed the mystic event of my Father
 of peerless, simile-transcending,
 resplendent, blossom-like holy feet enslaving me
 and initiating me into His band of devotees —
 me, who, instead of calling on Him :

“ Oh my Hoard ! Oh my Wealth!
 Oh Lustre of the ruby ! ”,
 and melting within my mind,
 am getting worn out
 between the charms
 of young women with cup-like breasts. 1

We witnessed the mystic event
 of the transcendently transcendent One —
 the eternally established Beginning,
 half of Whom is joined with the Dame —
 enslaving me,
 and, saying, “ Here is my devotee ”,
 initiating me into His band of devotees —
 me, who would neither think of anything righteous
 nor associate with those who think so,
 but am shuttling here
 sorrowfully between birth and death. 2

We witnessed the mystic event
 of my Father with three eyes —
 Master unto Himself,
 the One not possible for anyone to know
 but easy of access to devotees,
 a very Mother Who has placed the young moon

on the crown of His plaited locks
which surpass gold (in their sheen) —

enslaving me and initiating me
into His band of devotees

that my former potent karma may cease to be.

3*

Listen to the reason why eminent men of the world
call me a crazy fellow !

Without falling in with His will
and without knowing the technique
of gaining His holy grace,

I am bent on falling into the notorious hell
after my death.

We witnessed the mystic event
of my Father enslaving such a person
and initiating him into His band of devotees.

4

We witnessed the mystic event
of our **King** Who danced on the night of the cataclysm
in the middle of the (all consuming) fire —

He with the snake glistening in His fiery matted locks—
enslaving and initiating me.

into His band of devotees —

3. i. 'Master unto Himself'—elsewhere our poet acclaims the Lord as one Whose palms have never been joined in obeisance to any one. This is the first of the eight attributes of God referred to in verse 9 of the Thirukkural. The others are: essential purity, wisdom incarnate, all-knowingness, essential freedom from all bonds, all-powerfulness, and boundless bliss.

3. ii. 'that my former potent karma' etc.—compare with line 20 of decad 1 and the note thereto in Appendix III. The karma referred to here is *sanchitha* karma.

4. 'eminent men of the world'—see note to subtitle of decad 4. The enlightened ones, the sages, seeing Maanikkavaachakar miss an unique opportunity, called him a crazy fellow.

me who do not approach
 and join those who praise Him,
 me who do not pick various kinds of flowers
 and worship Him with them,
 but am going to rack and ruin,
 steeped in the charms of women
 with *kuravu* flower-decked tresses.

5

Meditate I did not,
 on account of my folly,
 on Your sacred name—the five (mystic) letters ;
 unappreciative of my good fortune,
 associate I did not with learned men of gnosis.
 I am bent on taking birth on earth
 and dying and turning into earth.

We witnessed the mystic event
 of the great One enslaving such a me
 and initiating me into His band of devotees.

6

We witnessed the mystic event
 of the Effulgence
 Which surpasses the combined effulgence of pearls,
 sapphires, rubies, diamonds and corals,
 my Father,
 enslaving and initiating me
 into His band of devotees —
 me who, thinking of this holey wall of flesh
 and worm-ridden, rotten, serum leaking-through roof

5. 'Cataclysm' — It is a belief in Caiva Siddhaanta that at the end of each aeon (*yugam*). God withdraws all souls and the entire world into Himself and sends a flood and a fire which envelop the whole universe. At that time "all except God doth perish". But, once again, the world emerges at His will.

as real, and residing in it,
am tossed about
in the whirlpools of the sea of troubles.

7

The burgeoning sparking Effulgence
firstly banished me
that I may not stand in His presence,
and then made me enter a human body ;
(later) He graciously looked at me,
and with one subtle brief word,
like ploughing in concentric furrows
without the aid of a yoke,
lifted me up,
and after cleaning me
that all the past false life I led may be shed,
made me (bliss incarnate),
enslaved me
and initiated me into the fold of His devotees.
This mystic event we beheld.

8

We witnessed the mystic event
of my Father enslaving and initiating me
into His band of devotees

7. 'holey'—full of holes ; this refers to the nine orifices of the body, viz., the two eye-sockets, the two ear holes, the two nostrils, mouth, the anus and the urethra.

8. i. 'one subtle ...word'—the original speaks of *nunniya nodiana sol*. *Nunniya* means subtle. In *nodi-ana*, *ana* means 'like'. *Nodi* means the snapping of the fingers, i. e., the time for which the sound of the snapping of the fingers lasts. Therefore, "one subtle word" can be only 'OM'. It cannot be *namacivaaya* or *civaayanama*.

8. ii. 'like ploughing in concentric furrows without the aid of a yoke'—This phrase merely emphasises the graceful ease with which he Lord redeems a person.

that I may not believe the words of the morons
 who, instead of seeking that Being
 Which is the goal of taking this (human) body —
 that transcendent Being Which,
 like the fragrance which rises from fragrant flowers,
 is of an ungraspable nature —
 are engaged in savouring the fruits of karma
 as they arise.

9

We witnessed the mystic event
 of the **Real Guide** —

Who graciously shot ruddy fire in an angry mood
 that the resplendent three fortresses
 may be shattered in a trice —
 rescuing me from the unreal path,
 me who was bent on plunging
 into the notorious hell, —
 feeling exultant
 with this potent karma-ridden small hut (of a body)
 raised on dense darkness (of ignorance),
 deeming it as a thing of worth.

10

Thiruchchitrāmbalam

9. 'savouring the fruits [of karma as they arise]'—living from moment to moment.

10. i. 'ruddy fire'—When Civan destroyed the three flying fortresses, though He was heavily armed, He did not use the arms, but merely smiled, when, lo, the fortresses caught fire and were reduced to ashes.

27. PUNARCHCHI-P-PATHTHU

Characteristics of Non-duality

(Sung at Thirupperunthurai)

Punarchchippaththu is a composite word made up of *punarchchi* (union) and *paththu* (decad), i. e., Decad of Union. It will be seen, however, from the various stanzas of this decad that it is not so much a decad on actual union as a decad of longing for union. As a bride of the Lord, Maanikkavaachakar longs for union, the conjugal union which is the fulfilment—the consummation—of the “surrender to a power of love that is greater than human”, (see definition of a mystic on page 15). This is the union referred to in the last verse of *The Thirukkural* which reads : “Sulks are a delight to passion ; delight to the sulks it is if one can a close embrace gain.” I have taken my phrase, “locked in an embrace ” from this context as fully representative of the sense of the word *punarchchi*.

The subtitle makes it clear that what our mystic longs for is the type of union which does away with duality altogether. Such an union is possible only when a soul departs from the body on a journey on the path of no return. This decad very appropriately follows the previous one in which our mystic declares that he has been initiated into the band of devotees of the Lord.

The Decad**Tiruchchitrambalam**

When am I to be seated close by Him
 locked in an embrace **with Him**—
 my uncut Gem,
 the sparkling golden Hill, unpierced Pearl,
 the Abode of mercy,
 the delicious Ambrosia Who gave Himself to me,
 and Whom the dark Vishnu and Brahmaa,
 being hindered (by their pride),
 are unable to yet approach—
Who, pleased with my useless service,
 assumed lordship over me, a straggling laggard ? 1

I, Your devotee, cannot bear, Oh King,
 to stay in this world !
 When am I to escape from sinking
 in the mire of the five senses
 and contemplate Him, calling on Him :
 “ Oh Civan, our great Lord ! ”
 and, like a spring in sandy soil,
 oozing and oozing and melting internally,
 wail and keep on praising Him
 while remaining locked in an embrace
 with my uncut Gem ? 2

When am I to remain locked in an embrace
 with my uncut Gem—
 the Pillar of fire rising to the sky
 to the terror of towering Vishnu and Brahmaa,
 my delicious Ambrosia
 Who enslaved unwilling me —

wailing unrestrainedly as much as I like
 in the presence of devotees with love-welling minds,
 and, strewing fragrance-laden flowers (on His feet),
 lie quiescently wearing those feet on my head ? 3

When am I to remain united with my uncut Gem
 locked in a tight embrace with Him,
 the Flame transcending speech and sense,
 the *Nelli* fruit, Honey, Milk,
 sweetness saturated Ambrosia,
 the Savour of ambrosia,
 Him with the name, repeating which,
 Brahmaa seated on the lotus petals,
 Vishnu, King of the devaas (Indraa),
 and others besides them
 worship Him ? 4

When am I to remain locked in an embrace
 with my uncut Gem,
 praising all the ways by which **Ammaan**—
 Whom Brahmaa and Vishnu,
 flying over and digging under the earth
 to see His brilliantly resplendent crown and feet,
 cannot see —
 took me into His service,
 and, enslaving me
 with all this vast world as witness,
 hailed me : “ Ah ! Come unto me ” ? 5

When am I to **remain locked** in an embrace
 with my uncut Gem
 and stay with Him with loving delight,
bewailing again and again,

with gushing tears gushing on
 and internal water setting the hairs on end,
that, on the transcendent Bliss
 solicitously coming forward in the past
 and bestowing grace on me—His slave,
 I parted from Him
 and (unnecessarily) experienced extreme delusion
 in this great vast world ?

6*

When am I to remain locked in an embrace
 with my uncut Gem
 and, with thrilling body, tremulous voice,
 streaming tears, and folded palms,
 adorn Him with flowers and adore Him—
 Him Who is the Fire rare to be conceived by others,
 The Water, the Wind, the Earth, the Ether,
 the unique One without a peer to Him ?

7

Thawing and thawing
 and melting and melting inwardly,
 when am I to enter His presence,
 and, looking on clearly
 at His sunset-resembling holy body,
 perform ecstatically various kinds of antics
 like standing, sitting, lying, rising,
 laughing, weeping, adoring, praising,
 and remain locked in an embrace
 with my uncut Gem ?

8*

When am I to remain locked in an embrace
 with my uncut Gem

6. 'internal water'—sweat.

8. 'presence'—a presence-chamber or other place where a great personage is.

and, singling out His beauteous feet blossom,
take shelter under them,

extolling Him thus and thus day and night :

“ Oh Father to three and seven worlds,
and Mother too !

Oh Simpleton Who enslaved even me—a cur !

Oh unique Medicine

for the disease of birth !

Oh ever bliss-exuding Gem

Which becomes whatever one desires for ” ?

9

When am I to remain locked in an embrace
with my uncut Gem ;

and take shelter under His feet blossom,

singing and singing :

“ Oh Protector, Creator,

and Secreter of the whole (universe) !

“ Oh older One to all the heavenly ones

in the spacious sky !

“ Oh primal One Who is the never-ageing First Cause !

“ Oh Seer Who previously enslaved me !

“ Oh our transcendent Being ! ”

10

Thiruchchitrabalam

9. i. ‘ three and seven worlds ’—the three worlds of the earth, the heaven and the nether regions, and the seven worlds which are given in detail in note i to stanza 10 of decad 7.

9. ii. ‘ Gem Which becomes whatever one desires for ’— *Chintamani*, the every wish fulfilling gem. We are reminded of Thiruvalluvar’s verse (265) which reads : “ As whatever is sought for is gained in the same measure (in the hereafter), whatever *thavam* is performed it should be performed here (on earth). ” The *Thirumurugaatruppadai*, one of the earliest Tamil Classics, has also a similar phrase in its sixth song : “ those supplicants who have received whatever they prayed for ” (line 249).

10. “ Secreter ”—God does not destroy the universe and beings on the Day of the Cataclysm but secretes them in Himself.

28. VAAZHAAPPATHTHU

Ways and Means of Gaining Deliverance

(Sung at Thirupperunthurai)

Vaazhaappaththu is a composite word which means 'Decad of Refusal to Live Any Longer'. The stanzas clearly echo the sentiment of this title. The subtitle is *Mukthi-upaayam*, which means 'Ways and Means for Gaining Deliverance' from the cycle of births and deaths. The only expedient for such a purpose is utter non-attachment to and detestation of worldly life on one side and, on the other side, a deep longing to gain the feet of the Lord. The stanzas show clearly that Maanikkavaachakar has fully understood the ways and means and was adopting them wholeheartedly.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

Oh our transcendent One
Who has pervaded the earth and the sky !
Take note, other support than You I have none.
Oh You Who shine with resplendence !
Oh King of Civapuram (my body) !
Oh Civan Who abides in Thirupperunthurai !
Whom shall I blame ? To whom shall I tell my woe
if You, Who assumed lordship over me,
would not show me grace ?
Take note that I cannot live
in this wide sea-girt earth !
Show me the grace of bidding me come unto You. 1

Oh great Gem Who enslaved worthless me !
 Take note, support other than You have I none.
 Oh unique One Whom even the heavenly ones do not know !
 Oh red-hued great Lord
 Who, transcending the power of perception of the two,
 transpierces the world !
 Oh King of Civapuram !
 Oh Civan Who abides in Thirupperunthurai !
 Oh our great Lord !
 Oh You Who rules over me !
 Do graciously call me unto You.

Except the Feet which Vishnu sings and praises,
 note that other support have I none !

You sought me out and enslaved me,
 Oh King of Civapuram !
 Oh Civan Who abides in Thirupperunthurai !
 With You only I sulk ;
 rejoice too, do I with You only !
 It is for You to make me feel reassured ;
 I am drooping here.

Note that I will not live !
 Show me the grace of saying : “ Come unto Me ”. 3

Oh You Who burnt the cities
 of the Raakshasaas skilled in wielding the sword !
 Note, other support have I none !
 Oh Dancer living in Thillai !
 Oh King of Civapuram !
 Oh Civan Who abides in Thirupperunthurai !
 Oh You Who, capable of transforming Yourself

2. i. ‘ the two ’-Brahmaa and Vishnu.

∴ ii. ‘ transpierces ’-pierces through.

into a Being without beginning or end,
grew transpiercing the bounds of the three worlds
on that day when the two attempted to see You !

Do show me the grace of saying :

“Come unto Me”.

4

Oh Partner of Her with speech like music !

Note that You besides, support I have none !

Oh You Who forcibly enslaved me !

Oh King of Civapuram !

Oh Civan Who abides in Thirupperunthurai !

Having already surrendered to You,

my thoughts, body, mouth, nose, ears, eyes —
all these —

note that Your slave

can no longer live in this world !

Do show me the grace of saying “Come unto Me”. 5

Oh Partner of Her with feet softer than cotton !

Note that You besides, support I have none !

Oh You Who enslaved me outright !

Oh King of Civapuram !

Oh Civan Who abides in Thirupperunthurai !

Afraid am I, a cur, a perfidious one,
who due to delusion, forgot the grace
which You, enslaving me, bestowed.

Note that I will not live here any longer !

Do show me the grace of saying : “Come unto Me”. 6

Oh Effulgence Which abides in the sun !

Note that Your feet besides, support I have none !

Oh Civapuram's King of sublimely beautiful form !

Oh Civan Who abides in Thirupperunthurai !

Note that I, deluded one —

who does not know how to live merged in You,
 looking up to Your mercy only,
 and how to thaw and melt in my mind —
will not live in the world !

Do show me the grace of saying : “ Come unto Me ”. 7*

Oh Partner of Her with fingers which caress the ball !

Note that You besides, support I have none.

Oh You Who resemble ruddy fire !

Oh King of Civapuram !

Oh Civan Who abides in Thirupperunthurai !

Oh infinite Ambrosia !

Oh rare great Being !

Oh delicious Ambrosia !

Oh You Who came and enslaved me
 that I may be redeemed !

Note that I will not live any longer !

Do show me the grace of saying : “ Come unto Me ”. 8*

Oh Destroyer of sin !

Your feet besides, note that support I have none.

Oh God of the gods !

Oh King of Civapuram !

Oh Civan Who abides in Thirupperunthurai !

Oh You Who shot up as a roaring pillar of fire
 while the two transpierced the three worlds
 up and down !

Oh You with the elephant skin !

Note that I will not live any longer !

Do show me the grace of saying : “ Come unto Me ”. 9*

7. ‘ Oh Effulgence ’ sun ! ’ — compare with line 20 of decad 3.

8. ‘ fingers which caress the ball ’ — see note to stanza 8 of decad 20.

9. ‘ the two ’ — Brahmaa and Vishnu.

Oh Partner of Her of flawless age-long fame !
 Note that You besides, support I have none !
 Oh Wearer of the waxing moon !
 Oh King of Civapuram !
 Oh Civan Who abides in Thirupperunthurai :
 Tell me, would I (ever) worship or praise others,
 or think of them as a succour to me ?
 Oh Lord with the young bull !
 Note that I will not live here !
 Do show me the grace of saying : "Come unto Me". 10

Thiruchchitrambalam

29. ARUTPATHTHU

Purification of Mahaamaayai

(Sung at Thirupperunthurai)

Arutpaththu is a composite word made up of *arul* (charity, highest form of divine love, grace), and *paththu* (decad), i. e., Decad of Plea for Grace. Each stanza of this decad ends with the refrain : ' *adiyen aadhariththu azhaiththaal athenthuve endru arulaaye* '. *Adiyen*, I, a slave ; *aadhariththu*, with ardour, reverentially, earnestly ; *azhaiththaal*, if I call (on You) ; *athenthuve* is not a Tamil word. It is either a Malayalam word or a Canareese word. In Malayalam, it means : "What is it ?". In Canareese, it means : "Fear not". Between the two meanings, the latter seems more relevant as a response to Maanikkavaachakar's call upon God with reverence and awe.

The subtitle is *Mahaamaayaa suddhi*— purification of *mahaamaayaa*. In a general sense, *mahaamaayaa* is another name for *paasam*, the third of the eternal triad — Pathi (God), pasu (the soul) and *paasam* (literally, a cord). Correctly speaking, however, *mahaamaayaa* is only one of the constituents of *paasam*. They are, as we have already seen, the three *malams* viz., *aanavam*, *kanmam* and *maayai*. *Maayai*, we may say, is matter, raw material. We called it a matrix earlier in this book. Matrix means a womb, the cavity in which anything is formed. The universe and the human body are formed in *maayaa*. It is, however, not only the womb, but also the raw material for the world and the body. It is more than this. When the Cataclysm comes, the universe and the souls recede into *maayaa*, and *maayaa* into Civan. *Maayaa* is an all-pervasive thing. One section of it, which is in contact with *aanavam* is called the impure *maayaa*. The rest is called (pure *maayaa*.) Some writers loosely speak of something called *prakrithi maayaa* as being a third section of *maayaa*. But, *prakrithi maayaa* is only an aspect of impure *maayaa*. The impure *maayaa* provides a body for the soul which is tainted by the *aanava malam* i. e., ignorance, and also a world for the embodied soul to live in, so that God may work on the soul through *kanma malam* and redeem it from the bonds of the *aanava - malam*. / According to Caiva Siddhaantaa, the soul (*pasu*)- and *paasam* (including *maayaa*) are not creations of God but are entities which are coeval and coexistent with Him and as eternal as He is. His dynamic aspect, Sakthi, works on

maayai and enables it to provide the world and the body. The soul in its process of emancipation from the bonds of *aanavam* has not only to be freed of impure *maayaa* but of pure *maayaa* as well. Then only it can gain *paramukthi*, i. e., transcendent deliverance. This corresponds to what is called *saayujyam*, becoming one with the Godhead. A lower state is *padamukthi*, which comprises *saalokam* (being in the same world as God), *saameepam* (proximity to God) and *saaroopam* (gaining same form as God). The pure *maayaa* is also called *maamaayai* or *mahaamaayai*. 'Transcending the bonds of this aspect of *maayaa* is called *mahaamaayai suddhi*.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

Oh Effulgence ! Oh Flame !
 Oh Lamp of encompassing light !
 Oh Half of the Dame of curly tresses
 and buxom bosoms !
 Oh transcendent One !
 Oh milk-white ash-smeared One !
 Oh Just One whom Brahmaa of the lotus
 and Vishnu do not know !
 Oh magnificent Beginning of all things
 Who appeared under the flower-laden *kurunda* tree
 in Tirupperunthurai dear to me !
 If this slave calls upon You with ardour,
 won't You, in Your grace, tell me : "Don't fear" ? 1
 Oh Dancer ! Oh Nimala !
 Oh ash-adorned One !

Oh You with an eye on the forehead !

Oh Lord of those in the heavens !

Oh unique One !

Though I searched for You

all over the world,

wailing with loud lamentations,

I did not find You,

Oh superb Reality Who appeared

under the *kurunda* tree of lush blossoms

in Thirupperunthurai with well constructed tanks !

If this slave calls upon You with ardour,

won't You, in Your grace, tell me : " Don't fear " ? 2

Oh our Spouse ! Oh Lord of my life !

Oh Spouse of the two with cardamom-scented tresses !

Oh Lord with reddened eyes

which stared at the superbly beautiful body of Cupid,
making it burst into flames !

Oh beautiful-eyed superb One

Who appeared under the *Kurunda* tree

of lush blossoms in Thirupperunthurai !

If this slave calls upon You with ardour,

won't You, in Your grace, say : " Don't fear " ? 3*

Oh our Father **Who**,

when the four-faced one on the lotus

And Kannan of the colour of the raincloud

said : " Oh unapproachable Vimala !

Do reveal Yourself to us ",

stood revealed as a wonderful fire !

Oh superb *Amalaa*

3. ' Spouse of the two '—>pouse of Gangaa and Paarvathi.

Who appeared under the *kurunda* tree
 of lush blossoms in Thirupperunthurai
 filled with the resonant four Vedaas !
 If this slave calls upon You with ardour,
 won't You, in Your grace, say : " Don't fear " ?

4

Oh Lord with a chest on which
 the imprints left by the pressure of the nipples
 of the two breasts of the Dame
 with waist like the hourglass-shaped drum
 and curly tresses
 shine like two spots of blazing light
 in an ash-covered smouldering fire !

Oh superb Saint Who appeared
 under the *kurunda* tree of lush blossoms
 In Thirupperunthurai
 surrounded by great groves of shrubs,
 if this slave calls upon You with ardour,
 won't You, in Your grace, say : " Don't fear " ?

5*

Oh coral-like One ! Oh pure One !
 Oh You Who,
 by the pure white ash thickly covering Your body,
 resemble a scintillating diamond !

Oh delicious Ambrosia Who gives great relish
 to the minds of those who contemplate You !

Oh superb Father Who appeared
 under the *kurunda* tree of lush blossoms
 in Thirupperunthurai
 filled with the sound of the perfect great Vedaas,

5. 'Oh Lord fire!'—refer to note to line 78 of decad 2 in Appendix III.

if this slave calls upon You with ardour,
won't You, in Your grace, say : " Don't fear " ? 6

Oh Reality ! Oh quick-change Artist
Who, holding the Meru itself as a bow,
burnt the three cities
of those who would not accede to You !
Oh You, with a body red-hued
like a fierce pillar of fire,
Who punished with Your foot the god of death !
Oh superb Sire Who appeared
under the *kurunda* tree of lush blossoms
in Thirupperunthurai dear to me,
if this slave calls upon You with ardour,
won't You, in Your grace, say : " Don't fear " ? 7*

Oh free One ! Oh primeval One !
Oh three-eyed One ! Oh Sage !
Oh Gnosis Who graciously bestows
the transcendent goal on those
who pluck unopened flowers and worship You with them,
and, contemplating You with devotion,
praise You !

Oh superb Father
Who appeared under the *kurunda* tree of lush blossoms
in Thirupperunthurai dear to me,
if this slave calls upon You with ardour,
won't You, in Your grace say : " Don't fear " ? 8

Oh Reality Who (benignly) looked
at this deluded person's mind

7. 'quick - change Artist' - in Tamil, *Vikirthan*; one who takes many forms with ease.

that its delusion may cease,
and put an end to the present as well as the future !
Oh Pure One !

Oh Lord with russet matted locks
on which rest the angry shining snake
and the waters of the Gangaa !

Oh superb Grace incarnate Who appeared
under the *kurunda* tree of lush blossoms
in Thirupperunthurai
resounding with the delusion-dispelling four Vedaas !
If this slave calls upon You with ardour,
won't You, in Your grace, tell me : " Dont fear " ? 9*

If I, Oh notable Ascetic, thinking of the glory
with which You appeared under the *kurunda* tree
of lush blossoms

in Thirupperunthurai ,
surrounded by well-kept beautiful groves,
and, remembering that occasion with regrets,
call upon You with ardour,
and hail You again and again :

" Oh my Lord and Lord of us all ! ",
with longing for experiencing You,
won't You, in Your grace, tell me :
Note ! This is the way to enter Kailash ;
come up from the billowy sea (of births) to join Me " ? 10

Thiruchchitrambalam

30. THIRU-K-KAZHU-K-KUNDRA-P-PATHIKAM

Vision of the Guru

(Sung at Thirukkazhukkundram)

This is the “Sacred Decad of Thirukkazhukkundru”. This place is nine miles from Chinglepet on the Southern Railway. It is mentioned in line 89 of decad 2. The significance of this and the next decad has been dealt with on pages 86 to 89.

The subtitle is unambiguous. Vision of the *Guru* is the same as Vision of Civan, as the *guru* in the case of Maanikkavaachakar was none other than Civan. He stresses this in lines 55 to 64 of decad 3 (quoted on page 9) and in decad 11 which please see.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

Oh Perunthurai's mighty Lord
of unvarying disposition !
Oh matchless Bliss to those who speak Your names !
On my attaining equanimity towards my karma—
good or bad—
so that the never desiccating seed of birth
could not sprout again,
You, my Lord, came forward
and, wiping away my on-coming sorrows,
showed me Your countless holy forms in Kazhukkundru. 1*

1. i. ‘unvarying disposition’—compare with verse 4 of the Thirukural in which God is described as One without likes or dislikes.

1. ii. ‘on-coming sorrows’ *aagamyā* (accruing) karma.

Oh great crazy One of Perunthurai
 Who carried the mud in exchange for rice rolls !
 Oh eminent One,
 Oh Lord of the Land of Bliss !
 I, guilty one,
 who have not lived according to the Law,
 did not cast my lot with You.
 (Yet) You came and showed Yourself in Kazhukkundru
 in order to enslave even cruel sorrow-ridden me
 who am lowlier than a mean dog. 2*

I, victim of my karma, deserted Perunthurai
 where You, wiping the tears of perplexed me,
 destroyed my *malam*.

I did not know what will come out of it later.
 Without a place to keep
 Your two resplendent feet,
 I was bewildered.

Preventing me from being bewildered,
 You came and showed Yourself to me
 at Kazhukkundru. 3*

1. iii. 'countless holy forms' - This should be taken to refer to something akin to the *visva-roopam* shown by Sri Krishnan to Arjunan, vide chapter 11 of the *Bhagavad Gita*. The phrase is taken by some commentators to refer to the many forms assumed by Civan from time to time- for which reason He is called Vikirthaa, (see note to stanza 7 of decad 29)—in order to bestow grace on His devotees (refer to decad 2). This interpretation, however, appears to me to be inappropriate in the context of this decad.

2. 'carried the mud' etc., - see story on page 14.

3. 'without a place to keep Your feet' - our sage accuses his heart in stanza 35 of decad 5 that it did not make itself into a shrine for the Lord. Kumaraguruparar sings that the place (heart) devoid of 'I and mine' is the place for the sacred feet of the Lord to abide.

While (Your devotees) assuming a (quality of) love
 rare to be assumed,
 and, remaining united with You,
 daily praised You,
 I, becoming ashamed in a way
 one should never feel ashamed,
 sank in the middle of the sea (of births);
 but, on my catching hold of the great raft
 in Thiruperunthurai beyond all praise,
 and getting up on it,
 You came and showed me
 Your rare-to-be-seen sacred form
 in Kazhukkundru.

4*

Oh Sow of beautiful form !
 Oh Cloud of Perunthurai
 Who is righteous conduct incarnate !
 Oh *Cikaamani* lodged in the mind of me
 who does not know even the least righteous conduct !
 Oh Time Who came with the whole world as witness
 when I importuned You again and again !
 You came and showed Yourself to me
 In Kazhukkundru
 that I may worship You.

5*

4. i. 'a love rare to be assumed' - compare with Thomas Merton's phrase, "a power of love that is greater than human" on page 15.

4. ii. 'in a way one should never feel ashamed' - a kind of shame which would drive one to acts like suicide or hara-kiri, or rolling down from a cliff, or splitting open one's head etc. See reference to such acts in stanzas 37, 39 of decad 5.

4. iii. 'great raft' - the mystic five letters - Na-ma-ci-vaa-ya.

5. i. 'Oh Sow'-see note to line 166, decad 4 and stanza 6, decad 43.

Oh great Flood (of grace) of Perunthurai
 Who bestowed unswerving fidelity on me !
 What is this You have done to me
 in front of strangers,
 causing them to talk many slanders about me ?
 On my hailing You with love
 and declaring that only Your unique sanctuary
 devoid of death and of the evil that follows death
 will be a sanctuary to me,
 You came and showed Yourself to me
 at Kazhukkundru.

6*

5. ii. Oh Cloud of Perunthurai'—see lines 66 to 95 of decad 3 for a full description of this Cloud which is God Himself.

5. iii. 'Cikaamani'—a gem worn on the crown of the head, here an epithet for God.

6. i. 'fidelity'—the word in the original is *karrpu*. It means chastity. The dictionary meaning of chastity is 'sexual purity', virginity'. But the word *karrpu* means quite a lot more than this. It has acquired through the ages a wealth of meaning that is understood or sensed by every student of Tamil, but which cannot, however, be put down in words. The choice of 'fidelity'—faithfulness to a husband or wife—is based on the fact that the relationship of God and Maanikkavaachakar is that of a bridegroom and his bride. The fidelity referred to here is that of God to Maanikkavaachakar whom God did not desert in spite of his numerous acts of intransigence. It would not be apt to interpret the fidelity as that of Maanikkavaachakar, in spite of the vows made by Maanikkavaachakar in stanzas 2 and 78 of decad 5 and a few other places. In the present context, it is the fidelity of God, the bridegroom, which is referred to. Please refer to stanza 9 of decad 37 where Maanikkavaachakar says that God trailed after him from place to place. What we should recall to mind here is Maanikkavaachakar's own admission in stanza 37 of decad 5 "wherein he says: "It is not Your divine will to ever part from me by even the least length of a millet seed". It is man who becomes unfaithful to God, not God to man.

6. ii. 'unique sanctuary'—the feet of God.

6. iii. 'evil that follows death'—birth.

Oh Eesaa Who invested the sixty-four hand-maidens
 with the (knowledge of the) eight attributes !
 On my sinking into the ancient potent karma
 which is the deluding three *malams*,
 You dispelled my dejection,
 and, enslaving me,
 bestowed on me Your pure flowery feet ;
 but (later) You made me suffer (humiliation)
 before Your devotees.
 Now, however, You have come
 and have shown Yourself to me in Kazhukkundru. 7*

Thiruchchitrambalam

31. KANDAPATHTHU

Vision of the Dance

(Sung at Thillai)

There is nothing complicated either in the name of this decad or its subtitle. *Kandapaththu* means the Decad of the Vision. The vision was of the dance of Civan in the hall in the temple at Thillai—the cosmic dance, the eternal dance which actuates the world, which, to use a colloquialism, keeps the world ticking. There is a separate note, adjoining the picture of Nataraja in the early pages of this book, on Civan, the Dancer.

7. i. 'invested the sixty-four handmaidens etc.'—see note to lines 62 & 63 of decad 2.

7. ii. The passage beginning with "On my sinking" and ending with "before Your devotees" refers to Lord Civan coming as a *guru* at Thirupperunthurai and enslaving Maanikkavaachakar, but later abandoning him (lines 127 to 129 of decad 2).

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

I saw in beautiful Thillai the infinite Bliss
 Who, clarifying my mind
 and transforming me into Bliss itself,
 enslaved me —

me, Who, infatuated with death-causing sense-organs,
 was drifting without anchorage
 to fall into the cruel hell. 1

I saw in the hall at Thillai —
 which the entire world worships —
 the peerless One Who enslaved me in a great way
 and severed the (bonds of) birth of me
 who afflicted with the torment
 called karma and birth,
 and, without thinking even the least about Him,
 was prostrate with dejection. 2

I, cur of a serf, saw with delight
 in beauty-encompassed Thillai
 the sweet-tasting feet of Him
 Who abides in Thiruththuruththi —
 the feet of Him Who, entering me at a time
 when I had not (even) taken shape (in the womb),
 established Himself in my mind
 and, reforming me in my very embryonic state,
 entered my flesh
 and assumed lordship over me out of His grace. 3*

3. i. "When I had not (even) taken shape (in the womb)" — compare with a saying of Epictetus which reads: "Surely God chooses His servants at birth or perhaps, before birth". Our Puraanaas too have many instances of such cases.

3. ii. 'Thiruththuruththi' — modern Kuttaalam.

I saw in the hall in Thillai—
 which everybody worships —
 Him Who, coming as a coercive Master,
 severed my creature nature
 and the bonds of the three *malams*
 with all the world looking on,
 that I, a cur,
 who was wallowing in untutored paltry knowledge,
 may gain beatitude and abide (with Him). 4*

In resplendent Thillai, I saw Him, Who
 extirpating the misery of this succourless cur who,
 caught in the whirlpool of caste, clan and lineage,
 was floundering therein,
 enslaved me,
 and Who, moreover, excising my foolish nature,
 image of others, sense of I and mine, and my speech,
 became (in me) flawless Ambrosia. 5*

4. i. 'severed my creature nature' — compare with these words of Thomas Merton ; " And here, when contemplation becomes, what it is really meant to be, it is no longer something poured out of God into a created subject so much as God living in God, and identifying a created life with His own life so that there is nothing left of any experimental significance but God living in God." For the full text, refer to pages 75 to 79.

4. ii. 'abide (with Him)' — this is the *saayujya* state, the state of *God living in God*

5. 'image of others' — compare with the last clause of stanza 2 of decad 5 and stanza 78 of same decad. Also compare with first half of stanza of 2 of decad 11 This expression is another form of expressing Maanikkavaachakar's fidelity to Civan — the Godhead. In a broader sense, this phrase means the sweeping of everything other than the thought of God under the Cloud of Forgetting about which the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* speaks in a passage immediately following the passage I have quoted on pages 95 and 96. This passage is worth quoting. He says :

Having thoroughly turned (the tide of) birth,
and, having made the two called disease and old age —
its kith and kin—cease to be,

I went forward and reached the sacred Hall of Gnosis
in the city of Thillai surrounded by dense groves
and saw the Brahmins residing therein
and the heavenly ones worship
the unique Principal Who owns the world. 6*

I saw in resplendent Thillai
the play of the Adept
Who, severing my creatureship
and the bonds of *malams*
and so changing me that people said :
“This man here is a crazy one
without devotion or decorum ”,

“If ever you are to come to this cloud and live and work in it, as I suggest, then just as this cloud of unknowing is as it were above you, between you and God, so you must also put a cloud of forgetting beneath you and all creation. We are apt to think that we are very far from God because of this cloud of unknowing between us and Him, but surely it would be more correct to say that we are much farther from Him if there is no cloud of forgetting between us and the whole created world. Whenever I say ‘the whole created world’ I always mean not only the individual creatures therein, but everything connected with them. There is no exception, whether you think of them as physical or spiritual beings, or of their states or actions, or of their goodness or badness. In a word, everything must be hidden under this cloud of forgetting.”

6. ‘Brahmins residing therein’— This phrase refers to the three thousand families of Brahmins who resided in Thillai and were called Thillai-vaazhl-andhanar’ i. e., Brahmins residing in Thillai. Of them—Sundarar and Sekkilaar sang at a later age. They were the custodians of the temple at Thillai and had the exclusive right of performing the service in the temple. The families, extremely reduced in number, exist even today in Thillai – modern Chidambaram.

Who, nevertheless, becomes the five elements,
 the senses, the sense-objectives
 and all the diversified things in the world —
 Him, the self-generating Light,
 The Emerald, Who, destroying my sorrows,
 enslaved me.

10

Thiruchchitrambalam.

32. PRAARTHTHANAI-P-PATHTHU

Everlasting Deliverance

(Sung at Thirupperunthurai)

Praarththanai means prayer, supplication. *Paththu* means decad. “Decad of Supplication”. Neither the title of the decad nor its subtitle requires any explanation as their purport is revealed in every stanza, particularly in the 10th stanza of the decad. The phrase in the original for Everlasting Deliverance is *sadhaa mukthi*, which is the same as *para-mukthi* mentioned in the note to the subtitle of decad 29. It is the antonym of *padhamukthi* mentioned in the same note.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

That day, mingling with (the rest of) Your devotees
 I was idly rejoicing;
 those days have faded.

10. ‘self-generating Light, the Emerald’—this phrase has the same meaning as line 124 of decad 3 and refers to the half male, half female-form, the father-mother concept of Civan.

In later days, suffering has entered (my life)
and stayed with me.

I am withered, Oh my Owner,
and, longing to see the Flame of unceasing bliss,
am sore distressed.

Do grant me Your grace
that ardour may grow in me, Your devotee. 1*

Some of the devotees received Your grace
through their surging ardour ;

I, Your slave, with no end
to this foul-smelling carcass,
am ageing in vain with frustration.

Weeding out the cruel karma of hardened me,
Oh my Owner, do graciously make this slave
melt unceasingly (with love)
that Your sea of mercy may swell in my mind. 2

While all the devotees have entered
and dived in the grace-filled great sea of ambrosia,
note, Oh our great One, I am wearied
of (still) bearing this darkness-abounding body.

Oh my Owner, I should get true love unto You
so that those who see me here
may not get frightened and say :
“ Here comes a mad man of deluded mind ”. 3

From among the true devotees
who long and long for You,
You fancied me and, by Your grace, enslaved me.
Oh Ambrosia ! Oh rare great Ruby ! Oh Pearl,

1. ‘ That day ’ - when Civan appeared in Thirupperunthurai as a guru surrounded by his devotees.

Who wiped out this slave's tribulations !

Oh You Who are like the flame of a lamp
which need not be trimmed !

Is it possible for great love to accrue
to this servitor too,
without desiring anything
which You do not desire ?

4*

Oh Partner of Her with blue lotus like coloured eyes
resembling the eyes of the *kayal* fish ! -

Would it be possible, by Your mercy,
for even me—a sinner—to truly merge with longing
in the Ancient Sea of Transcendent Bliss
along with Your other devotees who merge in it,
and become severed from life, body, I and mine—
with none of these excepted ?

5

Oh unchanging, unceasing,
unparting, unforgetting,
unremembering, measureless,
undying great Sea of Bliss !

Your devotees,
with their hearts thawing unceasingly,
have gained You outright.

I, a vile cur, who have stayed outside,
keep lamenting.

Oh my Owner ! I must get true love (unto You).

6

4. 'which You do not desire'—compare with stanza 6 of decad 33.
This stanza is a forerunner to the four immortal stanzas (6 to 9) of that decad.

6. 'unforgetting, unremembering'—since God is omniscient, and is eternally aware of anything in the past, present and future, there is neither forgetting nor remembering in His case.

While all and sundry grab and eat
the sea-like bliss,
is it fair that I, a base cur,
should merely keep multiplying my troubles
and remain grieving here?

Oh my Owner! Thinking that You, of Your own accord,
will graciously bestow bliss on me,
and remaining silent all along
without acquainting You (of my love),
I have been discarded and am ruined.

Oh Effulgence,
now at least, cleave
my darkness (of despair)
with Your flaming grace.

7*

Oh Civan! Entering and standing
in the midst of Your staunch and melting devotees
who seem to be filled with grace,
I, of hard-cored bamboo-like mind,
am wasting away.

Give me the love which the devotees
who are close to You have for You.

Graciously come quickly,
without any further delay,
and bestow on me

Your tender-leaf-like golden feet
that Your grace may mellow in me.

8

All Your kin are gratified
that You have bestowed Your grace

7. i. 'eat the sea-like bliss'—The use of the word 'eat' follows the English idiom 'to eat soup'.

7. ii. 'cleave . . . grace'—with the sword of gnosis.

without keeping back any unbestowed grace.

Will I, Your slave, only

languish like a stranger (to You)?

Oh Lord of the Land of Bliss,

Who, correcting my thoughts,

enslaved me with Your eminent grace !

Oh my great Lord ! You should bestow on me

supreme bliss non-evanescently.

9*

Oh Partner of Her Who resembles a fawn !

Oh delicious Fruit of those Who worship You !

If I, of unthawing mind,

remain resembling an unperforated gourd,

Oh my Hope, (how) have You prospered by this ?

When is the time to come off

When You, Oh King, will graciously bestow on me

a mind which, experiencing You

Who has entered my flesh,

will melt (with love) and swell (with bliss)?

10*

While Your devotees gather and gather in groups

and dance, laugh and exult (over me),

shall I, hapless one, droop and droop

and stand like a withered tree ?

Do grant me Your grace

that I may sulk and unite,

sulk and unite with You, my Owner,

and that my mind may thaw and thaw

9. 'Kin'—devotees.

10. 'unperforated gourd'—the shell of the pear-shaped gourd is made into a vessel to keep water or food by piercing and shaping the stalk end of the gourd into a handle and, at the same time, into a mouth. An unperforated gourd is of no use.

and swell with bliss,
and that I may become the same.

11*

Thiruchchitrambalam.

33. KUZHAITHTHA-PATHTHU

Surrender of the Soul.

(Sung at Thirupperunthurai)

Kuzhaiththapaththu is, perhaps, derived from the word *Kuzhaiththal*. But it is more probably derived from the word *Kuzhaidhal*. We may translate the title as the Decad of Snuggling up to God. The subtitle is clear. The spirit of the main title is reflected in a plaintive way in the first five stanzas and in the last stanza whereas the 6th, 7th, 8th and 9th stanzas reflect the spirit of the subtitle. This decad is not only a turning point in the spiritual career of Maanikkavaachakar but it is also the end of one stage of that career. The reader is requested to refer to the passage beginning from the last para of page 89 and ending with the second para of page 92 in this book for detailed elucidation of these points.

11. i. 'sulk and unite, sulk and unite'—compare with the last verse (1330) of *The Thirukkural* which reads: "Sulks are a delight to passion; delight to the sulks it is if one can a tight embrace gain."

11. ii. 'become the same'—be transformed or metamorphosed into bliss (Civam) itself. compare with stanza 1 of decad 51.

The Decad**Thiruchchitrambalam**

Oh my owner, protect me
 if the disease of ancient cruel karma torments me.
 If I, victim of cruel Karma, suffer,
 could it ever profit my soul ?
 Oh Umaiyaal's Spouse ! Oh Enslaver of me !
 If I offend You, should You not put up with it,
 Oh Lord with the crescent moon
 attached to Your matted locks ?
 If I call on You, crying : " Is this just ? ",
 is it proper for You
 to refrain from showing grace to Your devotee,
 Oh beautiful great One ?

Oh Partner of Her with creeper-like waist !
 Oh our King !
 I was under the belief that,
 dispelling all the troubles of this slave,
 You enslaved me formerly.
 Exclaiming, in Your grace, " Ah ! Ah ! ",
 why have You not destroyed this sin-tainted body ?
 Oh our Lord of the Land of Bliss !
 Oh my Owner !
 Without hailing me and taking me into Yours ervice,
 is it enough if You merely punish me ?

2

Your mercy which enslaved me—
 a cur with no support to hold on to—
 that I may be redeemed,
 has that mercy ceased to be today ?
 Oh partner. of the frail One !

Oh our King!

Hill-like faults as verily virtues,
if You take, what will be the harm?

Do take pity on me,

Oh our great One of eight shoulders and three eyes ! 3

Oh Bridegroom of Her

with glances like the fawn's !

Oh King! Making me forget Your glory,
and impelling me to enter the flesh,

You have made me wallow in it.

But I keep calling You, Oh King,
and asking You : " Which is the day when,
knowing the unknowingness of me, Your slave,
and bestowing grace of Your own accord,
You will call me unto Yourself ?" 4

From the speaking tongue
to the much talked about instruments
of understanding,

all of them You are.

Means of gaining certitude You are ;
perplexity (too) You are ;
evil and good in their entirety You are.

Were I to expatiate on You,
truly, there is no other single quality (but You) here.
If I am perplexed, Oh Lord of the Land of Bliss,
should You not comfort me
in such a manner that I may feel reassured. 5*

5. i. 'there is no other quality but You here' - compare with the concluding lines of stanza 7 of decad 22 ; qualities - all positive and negative qualities which we attribute to things and men, such as good and bad, white and black, love and hate, joy and sorrow, sweet and bitter, in fact, anything one may think of, is nothing but God.

What is to be desired for, You know best ;
it is You who give entirely what is desired for.

To Brahmaa and Vishnu who desire You,

You are rare to obtain ;

but of Your own volition

You assumed lordship over me ;

therefore, whatever, at Your pleasure,

You graciously do,

the same I seek ;

but should there remain in me

any trace of a trait of desiring something

of my own volition,

is not that too Your sweet will ?

6

Oh Lord, eternal like a hill !

On that day when You enslaved me,

Did You not appropriate my soul, body, and belongings—
everything indeed ?

Oh Lord with eight shoulders and three eyes,

can anything stand in my way today ?

Do You good or do You ill,

have I mastery over this ?

7

Me, a cur, the basest of curs,

You took a fancy for,

and of Your own accord enslaved me.

Other than leaving in Your hands

this matter of delusive birth,

is it for me to research into it ?

Is mine the authority here ?

5. ii. 'instruments of understanding' – the *anthakkaranams*, viz., wisdom, will, intellect and I-ness

Thrust me into a body,
 or set me under Your anklet-girt feet
 as You please,
 Oh Lord with an eye on the forehead !

8

Oh Lord with an eye on the forehead,
 I have, to the delight of my eyes,
 beheld Your anklet-girt twin feet.
 Henceforth, instead of contemplating them only
 day and night
 to the exclusion of all other thought,
 shall I, Oh my Father,
 brood on shedding this body on earth
 and entering the haven of Your feet ?
 Fine, indeed, is my serfdom to You !

9*

Having done some pretty things (in my time),
 I, a cur, now lament over them, Oh my Owner !
 You showed me Your resplendent holy body
 and took me into Your service ;
 but, Oh ancient One,
 without bestowing on me the noted great state,
 Oh Youth, Oh handsome Content of the Vedaas,
 Oh King,
 You have tormented me.

10*

Thiruchchitrambalam

9. 'to the exclusion of all other thought'—that is, putting a Cloud of Forgetting between oneself and all creation.

10. i. 'some pretty things'—some disreputable things.

10. ii. 'the noted great state'—*paramukthi*. See introduction to decad 29, *Arutpaththu*.

34 UYIRUNNI-P-PATHTHU

Welling up of Civaanandam

(Sung at Thirupperunthurai)

Uyirunnipaththu is a composite word made up of *uyir* (soul), *unni* (he who eats) and *paththu* (decad). *Unni* is here an epithet for God who eats, takes in, destroys soul-consciousness and confers Civa-consciousness. From this decad onwards right to the end, the subtitles deal with *Civaanandam*, Civan's bliss, i.e., the bliss resulting from Civa-consciousness. The bliss enjoyed so far was tinged by soul-consciousness. It is no longer so, except for very occasional harking back to the agony of the past, very much like the occasional sobbing sigh of a child which has ceased to cry. For further elucidation, please refer to the long passage quoted on pages (75) to 79 from Thomas Merton's book, *Seeds of Contemplation*. In the introduction to the previous decad, I said that besides being a turning point in the spiritual career of Maanikkavaachakar, it was the end of one stage of that career. The soul-conscious bliss ends with the last decad, and, from this decad onwards, the bliss is the product of pure Civa-consciousness. Furthermore, just as I said in the last paragraph of my introduction to the *Thiruvempaavai*, the 7th decad, that "the reader will find a marked contrast between the spirit of the poems of the *Thiruchchathakam* and *Neethalviñnappam* on the one hand and that of the poems of the sixteen decads beginning with the *Thiruvempaavai* on the other hand, and that he will not find in any of the stanzas of those sixteen

decads any breath of the desolation, despair, self-disparagement and self-denunciation characterstic of the 150 stanzas of decads 5 and 6", similarly, the reader will find the same type of marked contrast between the eleven decads (23 to 33) from *Ceththilaappaththu* to *Kuzhaiththapaththu* on the one hand and the 18 decads beginning from the 34th to the end on the other hand. For further comments on this decad, please refer to page 92.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

Oh Destroyer of Karma Who, with Uma
of moist-tongued snake's hood-like lower belly
as partner,

on no day, whatever, parts from my body !

Oh Rider on the bull !

Oh You Who abide in famed Thirupperunthurai
praised by persons of perfectly skilled tongues !

Anymore, when am I going to rejoice
and when am I going to exult ?

1*

Who am I to embrace the Lord's feet ?

Providing a seat for me, a cur,

He has entered my carnal body ;

He has mingled with my soul ;

He will never part from my mind.

He Who has a crown of honey-filled matted locks,

He Who abides in eternal Thirupperunthurai,

1. 'Anymore, when am I' etc.—The sense of hopelessness which pervades this outcry is a hangover from the 10 decads preceding the 33rd decad.

He gave all to myself
a treasure of bliss
not known by even the heavenly ones.

2

I do not know myself as I ;
I do not know day turning into night.
Making me a monomaniac,
He has transcended my mind and speech.
I do not know the trick played on me by Him
Who has the mighty Vishnu as His steed—
the Brahmin Who abides in eternal Thirupperunthurai ;
I know only the transcendent Flame

3*

Tell me, are there any other Destroyers of karma
(than Civan) in this vast world ?

Dear me ! The great One Who abides
in Thirupperunthurai

entering me (my body), enslaved me ;
and entering further,
after melting the marrow of my bones,
He is now in my mind, inside my eyes,
and in the midst of my replies.

4*

3. In connection with the last line, we may recall to mind the experience of Abiraamabhattachar who, unaware of the day turning into a new moon night, was conscious only of the effulgence of Abiraami—the name by which the Spouse of Civan goes in Kadavoor where this Bhattachar resided—of which he was having a vision in his intensive contemplation of Her. This led him to a near disastrous clash with the king when, in answer to his query as to what day it was, he said unhesitatingly that it was the full moon day, though it was really a new moon day.

4. 'in the midst of my replies'—Maanikkavaachakar means to say that whenever he answers a query, nothing issues out of his mouth except the name of God. Contemplatives in India are well known for this kind of reply. Readers will recall the opening lines of stanza 24

Oh you who are destitute of any hold !
 Oh you who are on the road to ruin !
 If you would be free of attachments,
 and, taking hold of that Hold
 Which has to be taken hold of,
 would reach the road which spells good,
 come rushing up and join those who,
 learning of the glory of the Lord
 of eternal Thirupperunthurai—
 He with the crown of matted locks
 decked with honey-laden garlands—
 cherish His anklet-girt feet (in their hearts).

5

Severing the *malam* which causes turbulence
 like the surging waves of the sea,
 He entered and filled my body and soul,
 without missing any space.
 This is, indeed, the prank played
 by our Thirupperunthurai-abiding transcendent Being
 Who wears a radiant bright moon
 and has a crown of spreading matted locks.

6*

I don't want fame ; I don't want riches ;
 I don't want birth and death.
 Never will I touch those
 who do not want bliss.
 I have gone and reached the feet

of decad 5 where our mystic sings : " If they spoke at all, they spoke and spoke nothing but 'Oh my Father' ! Oh great Lord of my fore-fathers !'. Contemplatives will not speak of their own accord ; but, if obliged to say something in reply to something said to them, they will more often than not merely repeat the name of God.

6. '*malam*'—*aanavam*, ignorance.

of the King of eternal Thirupperunthurai ;
 (the same) I have worn (on my head) ;
 I won't go away from them,
 and I won't let them go away from me any more. 7*

Oh our Haran ! Oh unique Medicine !

Oh, my King !

Oh ash abundantly-showing holy-bodied Ninmala
 Who abides in Thirupperunthurai
 surrounded on all sides
 by silt-abounding fields !

Shall I say that You are to me tree-honey,
 or ambrosia out of the roaring sea ?

I am overwhelmed by bliss. 8

I know the balance due to me ;

I do not know what I have ;

Oh our Haran ! Oh unique Medicine ! Oh my Ambrosia !
 He of the hue like the *vetchi* flower —

He Who abides in Thirupperunthurai —
 has eternally established Himself in my heart
 and stands there transformed into my self.

How wonderful it is ! 9*

While heaven-bent men of the world
 keep performing *thavam*,

I, bearing in vain
 the burden of this flesh-ridden body,
 have become a wild tree.

Oh You Who abide in Thirupperunthurai

7. ' bliss '—*Civan* is the word in the original. See note to line 17 of decad 1 on page 107.

9. ' tree-honey '—see note to stanza 7 of decad 19.

abounding with *kondrai* trees
 laden with honey-streaming blossoms !
 If I am a sinner,
 could You therefore say
 that You will not bestow Yourself on me ?

10*

Thiruchchitrambalam

35. ACHCHA-P-PATHTHU

Experiencing Bliss

(Sung at Thillai)

Achcha-p-paththu means Decad of Fear. The *Jeevan-mukthaa* has to be very careful of the company he keeps. This is the reason why sages take to the deep forest where there are only trees and plants and unspoilt birds and animals, where man—of whom Bishop Heber sang “man alone is vile”—has not penetrated to pollute everything he comes into contact with. Those *Jeevan-mukthaas* who, out of their boundless charity, choose to live in the midst of men pay a heavy price for (their concern for the world.) So Maanikka-vaachakar sings in this decad of what he fears, of what you and I should fear. ~

The subtitle is quite apposite, as it is in such a state that the dread of losing the bliss by contamination of the vile is at its greatest.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

The snake living in the ant-hill I will not fear ;
 the false one's (pseudo) " truths " I will not fear.
 Only if I see those who, even after arriving
 at the feet of our supremely great One
 of thick-set long matted locks —
 the One with an eye in the forehead —
 are not devoid of any attachment
 other than to our great Lord,
 thinking that there is probably another god,
 Ah me ! it is then that we are frightened. 1

Fear I will not, if desire rises in me ;
 even if the sea of karma were to engulf me,
 I will not fear.
 But if I see those who do not get disgusted,
 saying: " What kind of god is any god
 other than our Lord of sacred form—
 He Who is the Lord unto Himself,
 He Who was not seen by the disputatious two ",
 Ah me ! it is then that we are frightened. 2*

The flesh-clinging mighty lance I will not fear ;
 the glance through the corner of the eye
 by bangled women I will not fear ;
 but if we see the loveless ones
 who do not **adore** my uncut Gem—
 Who dances on the stage (in Thillai),
 looking at me, and making all my bones melt—

2. 'disputatious two'—Vishnu and Brahmaa.

and sweetly drink in His grace,

Ah me ! it is then that we are frightened.

3.

Parrot-like prattle of woman I will not fear ;

their crafty smile I will not fear.

But if I see those **devoid**

of the ripeness of devotion to approach the feet

of the Vedaa's Lord of body bathed in white ash,

and, becoming persons with teardrop-quivering eyes,

worship, weep and thaw in their minds,

Ah me ! it is then that we are frightened.

4*

Even if diseases all were to come upon me

I will not fear ;

birth along with death I will not fear.

But if we see those who

do not get steeped in bliss along with devotees of Him.

Who wears the fragmentary moon,

and wear the white-ash (on their bodies),

praising all the while His rosy feet,

which that (famed) Vishnu,

even by splitting open the hard earth,

could not see,

Ah me ! it is then that we are frightened.

5

Even the blazing fire I will not fear ;

even if the mountains roll down on me,

I will not fear.

But if I see those who do not become worshippers

of the lotus feet of Him with ash-drenched shoulders—

4. 'parrot-like prattle'—cajolery. Those who have kept parrots as pets know how, sitting on one's shoulders, the parrot will playfully nip the lobe of one's ear and murmur into the ear in a cajoling voice sweet nothings.

the bull-Rider, my Father transcending speech—
 and, adorning their heads
 with those renowned blossoms,
 do not become contrite slaves (unto Him),
 Ah me ! it is then that we are frightened. 6

Even undeserved calumny I will not fear ;
 to die I have not feared long since.
 But if we see those whose hearts do not thaw
 with worshipping the feet of the primeval One
 Who, wearing a garland
 of just blossoming *kondrai* flowers,
 dances in the resplendent hall in Thillai
 swinging in His hand the smoke-laden fire,
 Ah me ! it is then that we are frightened. 7

The hitching-post smashing elephant
 I will not fear ;
 fiery-eyed tiger I will not fear.
 But if we see the witless ones
 who would not happily abide with renown
 worshipping the anklet-gripping feet —
 unapproachable by the heavenly ones —
 of our Lord of fragrance-diffusing matted locks,
 my Father,
 Ah me! it is then that we are frightened, 8

Even the cloud-traversing thunder I will not fear ;
 association with kings too I will not fear.
 But if we see those who are afraid
 to apply on their foreheads
 the sacred ash of our Lord
 Who transforms poison into food,

and Who, as my Lord, enslaved me outright,
Ah me ! it is then that we are frightened

9

Bendless arrow I will not fear ;
Death's fury I will not fear,
But if we see those no-males
who cannot praise and unswervingly worship,
and contemplate the waxing moon adorned One—
our Lord—
with their minds thawing, crumbling and melting,
and glowing eyes streaming with tears,
Ah me! it is then that we are frightened.

10*

Thiruchchitrambalam

36. THIRUPPAANDI-P-PATHIKAM

Growth of Bliss of Civan—consciousness

(Sung at Thirupperunthurai)

Thiruppaandi-p-pathikam is a composite word made up of *Thiru* (sacred), *paandī* (Paandiyan- here standing for the Lord and not the Paandiyan king) and *pathikam* (decad)—‘The Sacred Decad of the Paandiyan’ In stanzas 3, 5, 6 and 9 our mystic calls God as *Paandiyan-naar*, and in other stanzas, relates the special grace

10. i. ‘Bendless arrow’—the word ‘bendless’ reminds us of the 279th Tirukkural verse which reads :

“The arrow (though straight in shape) is cruel ;
the lyre’s stem (through crooked) is good
(in its action).

By the same token, know the character
of ascetics by the way they behave.”

10. ii. ‘no-males’—The poet in this word sums up his opinion of those who do not love God. He calls them eunuchs.

to the further progress of rebirths
of the King of the Madhuraiyaars.

2

Oh you with hearts set
on swimming and bathing in the flood of bliss !
Paandiyanaar, Who came riding on a horse,
assumed a form of a flood of bliss
that a flood of bliss may cover the world,
and took possession of the minds of His devotees.
Do you enter the flood of great bliss
and cherish His anklet-girt feet.

3

Oh people well disposed to thronging births !
Do not go to Paandinaadu.
This time is the time of all times
when God sets out for battle
in the good country of the Paandiyan.
Drawing out of its sheath

3. 'Paandiyanaar'—Civan.

3. i. 'thorny goad' — I follow Sri Dhandapaani Dhesikar in translating *Kazhu-k-kadai* as thorny goad. As people rode horses in the past without stirrups and with bare feet, they used a rod with a thorny head instead of spurs. C. Northcote Parkinson in his book *East and West* quotes many authorities and says :—

"As for the stirrup, it was an invention which had cropped since the 5th century.....; stirrups are not mentioned in literature till about A.D. 600 There is no Greek or Latin word for the stirrup..... Arabs lacked stirrups when they began their period of conquest in A. D. 647."

fact, I remember to have read somewhere that, in Maanikkavachakar's time, shoeing of horses was not known, or that the cunning Arab farriers had not taught the art to Tamilian buyers, so that the horses went lame very quickly and had to be frequently replaced by new horses which very much suited the Arab traders.

3. ii. 'Madhuraiyaars' — people o Madhurai.

the flashing sword of gnosis,
and mounted on the horse of bliss,
He will fell down the births of those
who come across Him
and make them roll down on the vast earth.

40

Well in advance of your time
love God and be redeemed.
He, whom the one who swallowed the world
or Brahmaa or the heaven-dwellers
can neither conceive nor approach,
He Who swallowed the poison,
our lord of Paandi,
is lavishing the contents of His principal treasury
on His devotees;
come and rush forward to receive it.

5*

Even he of the fish standard
is not capable of describing the Effulgence
which lighted (the lamp of gnosis in me)
that the delusive dense darkness may perish
and every object may be clear.

Desire to gain His feet ;
the moment you desire,
there will be no obstacle.

This is indeed the nature of the deliverance
which Paandiyanaar graciously bestows.

On His coming mounted on the delusive wild horse
and taking hold of us,

5. 'the one who swallowed the world'—Vishnu.

6. i. 'he of the fish standard'—the Paandiyana King.

6. ii. 'every object may be clear'—revealing its unreality.

6. iii. 'Paandiyanaar'—Civan.

the inimical thing called this birth
will flee and cease to be.

Do go and join the rosy feet of the Southerner
of perfect age-long bounteousness

Who graciously gives to those
who have taken refuge in Him

befitting grace of rare great merit.

7*

He Who enslaved us by immersing us

in an unceasing eternal flood of bliss,

by showing us His undiminishing mercy,

by eliminating our potent karma,

and by cutting the bonds of the ancient *malam*,

He will bestow on us as a gift

not only the great status

of kingship over Paandinaadu

but over the entire world as well ;

go and push forward to receive the gift.

8*

On the transcendent Paandiyaanaar—

Who melts the bones of devotees

who praise Him that they may cross

the three waters of birth

springing out of soul-pervading evil karma—

arriving mounted on His horse,

the creeper-like delicate damsels,

whose wisdom has been usurped by Him,

7. i. 'delusive wild horse'—wild fox turned into horse.

7. ii. 'inimical thing'—the three *malams* of ignorance, karma, and matter, or lust, anger, greed, infatuation, egotism, and envy.

7. iii. 'befitting grace'—grace befitting those who have sought refuge under His feet.

8. 'ancient *malam*'—ignorance.

assumed a wooden nature,
and, forgetting themselves,
have ceased to know who they are.

9*

Oh you people without faith,
go and align yourself firmly with the rosy feet
of the unique Knight
Who, having overcome the god of death
and having gained victory over the five kings,
was seated in state along with His great Consort,
and Who, taking our side,
came up to the King with the fish standard
and did the remarkable feat
of consuming his dear soul-consciousness.

10*

Thiruchchitrambalam

9. i. compare the last four lines with the poem of Thirunaavukkarasar quoted on page 225.

9. ii. 'Paandiyanaar'—Civan.

9. iii. 'the three waters'—the sea composed of river water, spring waters and rain water.

9. iv. 'damsels'—devotees; see stanza 6 of decad 20.

9. v. 'assumed a wooden nature'—becoming insensible to everything.

10. i. 'five kings'—the five senses; in the 6th verse of the Thirukural, Thiruvalluvar describes God as "He who has extinguished the five desires which have the five sense-organs as outlets."

10. ii. 'king with the fish standard'—Paandiyan whose flag emblem was a fish.

37. PIDITHTHAPPATHTHU

Relating the Union in the Delivered State

(Sung at Thirupperunthurai)

Pidiththappaththu is a composite word made up of *pidiththa* (of catching) and *paththu* (decad). "The Decad of Apprehension of the Godhead". This decad, however, is different from the 1st sub-decad of the 5th decad, the title of which we have advisedly translated as "Discrimination of the Real". This decad is also different from the apprehension of the Godhead so exultingly sung in the last stanza of the 22nd decad which, we said, sang of the attainment of the *Jeevan mukthaa*, state where there are still two entities—one being the seeker and the other being the sought, i. e. the Godhead. Soul-consciousness has not yet been completely eradicated. Civan-consciousness is not yet everlasting. The sub-title of that decad well explains this distinction. It is not possible to expand this thought, much further in this short note, but discerning readers will easily perceive the difference on meditating on this matter for a while.

The sub-title to the present decad needs no explanation. All the stanzas sing exultingly of the capture of the Godhead which is union in the state of deliverance from the chain of births.

The Decad

Tiruchchitrambalam

Oh King to those above !

Oh unexcludingly pervading Union !

Oh Medicine Who, ripening in filthy me

before the season
 and enslaving all my clan,
 made me so live
 that my (worldly) life ceased to be !
 Oh perfect Being—
 the ultimate Finding (of all the scriptures) !
 Oh anklet-girt Feet of renown'!
 Oh my Treasure ! Oh great Lord Civan !
 On behalf of all of us I have caught You firmly.
 Henceforth, where will You go, at Your pleasure ? 1*

Oh King of the heavenly ones,
 Who unceasingly delights to ride on the bull !
 Oh Reality Who owns karma-ridden me !
 Oh God Who enslaved me,
 thereby saving me, Your slave, from being degraded
 by staying in this entirely worm-infested body—
 which is never free from stench—
 and growing old and turning to utter dust.
 Oh great Sea of mercy !
 I have unintermittingly caught You firmly.
 Henceforth, where will You, at Your pleasure, go ? 2*

1. i. 'ripening.....before the season' — I follow Dhandapaanì Dhesikar in this translation. Compare with stanza 3 of decade 31.

1. ii. 'unexcludingly pervading Union' — all embracing union.

1. iii. 'anklet-girt Feet of renown' — The accepted word is 'Kazhal. Sri, M. Arunachalam, a critic of *The Thiruvaachakam* prefers 'Kadal — sea — which is found in some manuscripts. But wherever the word 'Kadal' has come in this work, it has been accompanied generally by a word or words signifying 'grace'. We see no such word here.

2. 'I have unintermittingly caught You' — this is *nirvikalpa samaadhi*.

Oh Mother ! Oh Father ! Oh matchless Gem !
 Oh delicious Ambrosia growing out of love !
 Oh Treasure !
 Oh great Lord Civan,
 Who bestowed perfect Civan-hood
 on this worm-infested vagrant outcaste
 who keeps increasing falsity and decreasing his days !
 Right now, I have caught You firmly.
 Henceforth, where will You, at Your pleasure, go ? 3

Oh Flame of grace ! Oh mellowed Fruit !
 Oh King to rare contemplatives of great prowess !
 Oh Scriptures which have You as subject !
 Oh Experience past all praise !
 Oh Radiance of union !
 Oh Treasure that has entered the minds of devotees
 on their gaining clarity !
 Oh great Lord Civan !
 In the dark place I have caught You firmly.
 Henceforth, where will You, at Your pleasure, go ? 4*

Oh unique One without any peer to You !
 Oh Light (of gnosis)
 Which shines in this slave's mind !
 Oh Love Who bestowed the quintessence of Yourself
 on me of no merit and ignorant of the true goal !
 Oh Image of the ineffable flamboyant flame !
 Oh my Treasure ! Oh great Lord Civan !

4. i. 'Radiance of union' — *tejas*, the aura or radiance which emanates from the body of a person who has apprehended the God-head.

4. ii. 'dark place' — see exposition on pages 94 to 97.

In my state of weariness I have caught You firmly.
Henceforth, where will You, at Your pleasure, go ? 5*

Oh Pinggaka Who, occupying the mind
of this forsaken one as Your shrine,
and, severing the roots of my birth,
graciously bestowed immeasurable bliss on me,
and enslaved all my clan !

Oh our great Possession !
Oh Vision seen in the open space (in my heart) !
Oh Treasure of this slave !

Oh great Lord Civan !
In my last days, I have caught You firmly.
Henceforth, where will You, at your pleasure, go ? 6*

Oh Being Who graciously bestowing on this slave
the ancient Being Himself
Who severs the roots of *paasam*,
that I may take hold of Him,
and Who, pleased with my worship, entered my mind
and showed me Your blossom feet !

Oh effulgent Lamp !
Oh Image of the flamboyant flame !
Oh my Treasure ! Oh great Lord Civan !
Oh Eesan ! I have caught You firmly.

Henceforth, where will You, at Your pleasure, go ? 7*

5. 'image of the flame' — the Pillar of fire which appeared before Brahmaa and Vishnu.

6. 'Vision seen in the open space in my heart' — the ceaseless vision of the Godhead enjoyed by the contemplatives in their hearts. See line 2 of decad 1 and note thereto, and also note to lines 33-35 of the same decad.

7. i. This stanza is addressed to the *Guru* Who appeared at Thirup-
perunthurai to enslave Maanikkavaachakar. Compare with lines 55
to 64 decad 3.

Oh Father ! Oh Source (of all things)
 Who is all the world to the heavenly ones !
 Oh Gnosis without any end whatsoever !
 Oh Treasure which devotees have firmly grasped !
 Oh great Lord Civan ! Oh crazy One !
 Oh Trickster Who,
 though proliferating into all beings,
 yet, becomes separated from them,
 and stands as none of them !
 I have caught You firmly.
 Henceforth, where will You, at Your pleasure, go? 8*
 Oh my Treasure ! Oh great Lord Civan !
 Oh You Who, very much more solicitous
 than a mother who mindfully suckles her child,
 melting this sinner's flesh
 and increasing the inner light,
 squirted the never-drying up honey (of bliss)
 (into my mouth)
 and trailed after me from place to place !
 I have (now) followed You
 and have caught You firmly.
 Henceforth, where will You, at Your pleasure, go ? 9

7. ii. In the 1st line, the word 'Being' refers to the *Guru* ; in the second line, it refers to the Godhead.

7. iii. 'Lamp'—Lamp of gnosis.

8. 'Oh Trickster as none of them'—compare with second part of line 71 of decad 1 and with stanza 7 of decad 22.

9. 'trailed after me from place to place'—Though I respect the several commentators very much, and owe them very much, my mind refuses to follow them into the tortuous and unnecessary interpretations which their learning and position compel them to give for these words. Keeping the image of the solicitous mother in mind, what is

Oh Eesan ! Oh flawless Gem

Who, making my foul carnal body mellow pore by pore,
entered it,

taking it verily for a lofty golden temple,

and, melting all my bones,

came as an easily accessible One

and enslaved me !

Oh benign Effulgence Who eradicated all my bonds
of sorrow, birth and death, and delusion !

Oh Bliss ! I have caught You firmly.

Henceforth, where will You, at Your pleasure, go ? 10

Thiruchchitrambalam

38. THIRUVESARRAVU

Extirpating the Demonstrative Method of Knowing

(Sung at Thirupperunthurai)

Thiruvesarravu is a composite word made up of *Thiru* (sacred) and *esarravu*. *Esarravu* has the following meanings : grief, desire, praise or eulogy. Other translators have rendered this title as "Sacred Sadness" or "Sacred Grief". But the stanzas of this decad show that our mystic is praising the Lord for favours received. Therefore, it seems best to render the title in English as "Sacred Eulogy".

more simple and natural than imagining her nervously trailing after a toddling child lest it come to any harm as it follows the chicks and pups into the yard or chases a ball or a butterfly or anything which catches its fancy. God, the Mother of all the world, thus watches over His devotees. Māanikkavaachakar says that there was a time when God trailed after him like a solicitous mother, but that, later, He deserted him, whereupon Manikkavaachakar followed Him and caught Him.

The subtitle is clear enough though it is difficult to trace its purport in the stanzas of the decad. We can, however, glimpse its purport in stanzas 4 and 5. This subtitle, however, as a sequel to the foregoing decad, is quite apposite.

There is another feature about this subtitle which we should not fail to note. In the original, it is very nearly the same as the title of sub-decad 3 of decad 5. The latter is called *Suttarruththal* and this is called *Suttarrivu ozhiththal*, that is, the subtitle of this decad has an additional word between *suttu* and *ozhiththal*, viz., *arrivu*. (*Ozhiththal* and *arruththal* mean the same, i. e. extirpating). This additional word, however, does not make any vital difference to the meaning of the subtitle which is much the same as explained in the former case. In meaning it may not differ, but in its significance in relation to its setting, it is very different. Sub-decad 3 of decad 5 speaks of a discipline to be followed. It is a clause in a manual of instructions whereas the present decad is the living out of the instruction contained in that clause. That is ambition or aspiration, this is achievement.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

Forcibly drawing and drawing me of steely mind
 unto You,
 and melting my bones,
 You showed me the sugar-cane like taste
 of Your anklet-girt twin feet.

Oh You with matted locks
lapped by the subdued waves of Gangaa !
Was it not Your supreme grace
which turned all the foxes into big horses ?

1

Oh Partner of the Dame of melodious speech !
Oh highly edible delicious Ambrosia
to those who have become Your slaves !
Oh Owner of this slave !

Oh You Who, severing my very earthy birth,
enslave me !

Was it not because You bade me come
that I, gaining a vision of Your anklet-girt feet
to the delight of my eyes,
have been redeemed ?

2

Oh my Owner Who ate the poison surging from the sea !
Oh our transcendently transcendent One !

Was it not through Your saying :

“Ah” to succourless me

who, with no kin, was sinking

in the cruel hell called birth and death,

and through Your showing Your feet blossom to me
(that I was able to shed the demonstrative method

of knowing) ?

3*

Oh Charmer of snakes of soft tongues !

Oh You with spreading locks !

Oh great Lord of devotees

whose heads are adorned by Your feet blossom !

Lo ! Was it not through Your rescuing me

3. The last line is how Sri Dhandapaani Dhesikar concludes the unfinished sentence in the original.

from worshipping petty gods with shortcomings
 that the trend of my mind
 was turned to contemplate Your greatness ? 4

Though I would not learn the wisdom of the scriptures,
 and I would not thaw and melt,
 yet I do not know any other god but You.
 Through the power of Your WORD,
 having arrived at Your anklet-girl far-reaching feet,
 I am proudly abiding there.

Our great Lord,
 is not Your golden graciousness towards me, Your slave,
 even like providing a golden seat for a dog ? 5*

Falling into trouble through the side-long glances
 of women with cotton-like soft feet,
 I was trembling with mounting poisonous misery.
 By Your grace I was saved.

Oh our Lord ! Oh our Owner !
 Oh Ambrosia on the stage (of my heart) !
 Was this not through Your telling me, Your slave :
 "Don't fear !", and enslaving me ? 6

Oh great Lord Civan
 Who is unknowable by even the heavenly ones,
 and Who is residing here in southerly Thirupperunthurai !
 Was it not by merely looking in my direction
 that You, out of Your love for me,
 severing my barren births
 and making my heart soften,
 graciously entered me and enslaved me ? 7

Oh senior-most One ! Oh never-ageing first One !
 Oh infinite Vedaas ! Oh Substance thereof !
 Oh You Who burgeoned as being and non-being !
 Oh our Lord !

Was it not due to Your mercifully extricating me
 and enslaving me
 who, entering into this here world, was wallowing therein,
 (that I was able to shed the demonstrative method
 of knowing ?) 8

Oh handsome great One
 Who has assumed Idaimaruthu itself as Your abode !
 Here and now on earth, graciously **grant me**—
 who with Your sweet-to-gain blossom feet
 pervading and standing up in my mind,
 ran about in the streets melting internally
 and wailing loudly and hailing You :
 “ Oh great Lord Civan ! ”—
 the means of diving in the wide sea
 of Your transcendent mercy,
 out of which (so far) I (merely) drank. 9*

Did I indeed perform *thavam*
 and *Ci-vaa-ya-na-ma* gained to chant ?
 Civan, the mighty Lord,
 Who tastes sweet like honey and delicious ambrosia,
 of His own accord came and entered my heart,
 and to me, his slave, did the gracious favour
 of impelling me
 to castigate my carnal life and hate it. 10

Thiruchchitrambalam

9. Maanikkavaachakar who had so far only drunk from the sea of
 mercy now longs to dive into it.

39. THIRUPPULAMBAL

Maturing of Civaanandam

(Sung at Thiruvaaroor)

Thiruppulambal is a composite word made up of *thiru* (sacred) and *pulambal* (delirious talk). Thus, this is the Decad of Delirious Talk. This decad has only three stanzas. In the case of those decads which do not have either 20 or 10 stanzas, we are inclined to wonder whether any stanzas have been lost in the course of the centuries as is the case with the works of Sambandar or Thirunaavukkarasar.

Readers would have noted the increase in intensity of Civan-consciousness and bliss from the 34th decad onwards. Considered in the light of the trend of such intensification of Civan-consciousness, the title of this decad is quite appropriate. So is also the sub-title. In fact, beginning from the 34th decad, Maanikka-vaachakar is on the highway to the Land of No Return, and his spiritual state gets more and more exclusively Civan-conscious, and his experience of the bliss of Civanhood—experience of becoming Civan—gets more and more intensified till, in the words of Thomas Merton, Maanikkavaachakar “does not have an experience but becomes Experience itself”, which, Merton explains, “is entirely different, because one no longer exists in such a way that one can reflect on himself or see himself having an experience. It is god living in God. It is the FRUITION OF GOD”.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrabalam

Oh You known by a way of gnosis which Brahmaa
of the lotus

and Vishnu do not know !

Oh Part of Her with cupped breasts
resembling the *kongu* flower !

Oh You bathed in white ash !

Oh You Who owns Thiruvarooor

surrounded by towering ramparts !

I, Your slave, will not extol

anything other than Your anklet-girt feet blossom. 1*

Oh Lord with matted locks ! Oh You Fire-Dancer !

Oh You armed with the resplendent trefoil lance !

Oh transcendent Effulgence ! Oh Lord of the soul !

Oh You with a young white bull !

Oh You of Perunthurai

surrounded by spreading groves !

Oh You Who own this slave !

I do not have any sure succour other than You. 2*

Kinsmen I do not want !

(Home) town I do not want !

Name I do not want !

(Company of) the learned ones I do not want !

Things to learn too, henceforth, shall cease !

Oh Dancer Who abides with pleasure in Kutraalam !

Like mind of calved cow, I want to thaw and melt,

and yearn only for Your tinkling anklet-girt feet. 3*

1. 'Kongu'—the silk-cotton tree ; *bombax gossipinum*.

2. 'Fire Dancer'—Civan carries fire on the palm of one of His hands

3. 'name'—fame.

40. KULAAPPATHTHU

Unintermitting Experience.

(Sung at Thillai)

Kulaappaththu is a composite word made up of *Kulaa* and *paththu*. *Paththu* means a decad. What does *kulaa* mean? The same word appears along with the word *Thillai* in all the stanzas of this decad. Some commentators have, therefore, taken the word as an attribute to *Thillai*, and have interpreted the word to mean 'resplendent'.

Kulaa is derived from the words *Kulaavuthal*, which has the following meanings: to converse or talk with one another, to perambulate, to rejoice, to shine, to bend, to exercise friendship, to be clear or resplendent, to become established, to celebrate, to fondle, to win over. I feel that, following the deepening tenor of spiritual experience from the 34th decad onwards, it would not be inappropriate to translate the word as "commune" which is defined in the dictionary as "to converse or talk together; to have intercourse, especially, spiritual". Thus, the title is best rendered as "The Decad of Communing (with the Godhead). The sub-title will then be in the nature of underscoring the above translation of the main title.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

Is it not through (eternal) communion
with the Lord Who enslaved me at Thillai

that I, deciding that the begging bowl
 and the loin cloth only shall be my kin,
 and, with melting mind, becoming certain
 that the wealth to seek
 is Civan's anklet-girt feet only,
 curvet about and dance
 with my body and soul reeling (with bliss).

1*

Is it not through (eternal) communion
 with my Enslaver of Thillai
 Who knit me to His feet
 that, howsoever many sin-ridden evils
 I, His slave, may do
 due to lust for the arms of women
 of narrow waist like the hour-glass shaped drum,
 and sophisticated speech,
 I will neither be ruined nor be born again?

2*

Is it not (eternal) communion
 with the Thillai Enslaver
 which made Him enter me out of love,
 melt my bones,
 destroy the might of the twin deeds,
 extirpate my sorrows,
 cleanse me of (sense of) dualities,

1. (eternal)—this word is not in the original, but is brought in on the authority of the subtitle to this decad.

2. 'sophisticated' — the corresponding word in the original is *thooya*, the meaning of which is pure or refined. In the present context, 'sophisticated' will best bring out the intention behind Maanikka-vaachkar's use of the word *thooya*.

and completely destroy
all my past ?

3*

Is it not through (eternal) communion
with the Thillai Enslaver that **I know Him** —
the Civanhood which takes shape
as ambrosia in my surging thoughts—
Who is noted for never parting from those
who are minded to part from the cliques of people
without ideals or code of conduct or character.

4*

Is it not through (eternal) communion
with the Thillai Enslaver
that, having been rid of the *malams*
to the end that this birth
bound to a name and characteristics may cease,
I am replete with drinking the honey
of Civan's mercy, gaining it in the same manner
by which all other servitors get at it ?

5

Is it not due to (eternal) communion
with the Enslaver in lovely golden Thillai
that, lest this body begin (again and again)

3. 'all my past' - past karma, i. e. *sanchitha* karma (see note to line 20 of decad 1 in Appendix III). A Tamil poem well explains this act of grace of God. It says :

" Even as the doomsday fire will burn cotton,
The fire of gnosis will burn and reduce to ashes
All the *sanchitha* (residual) karma—
The variegated seed of several births.
Agaamiya (accruing) karma
will leave the soul alone
without approaching it even the least ;
the remaining *praarabdhaa* has to be experienced in full.

4. 'surging'—surging with love.

as a bud (embryo) in a woman,
 turn to floret, flower, raw fruit,
 and, ripening in vain, die off,
 I am able to approach Him
 that my mind which trusts Him (only)
 may merge in Him?

6*

Is it not through (eternal) communion
 with the Thillai Enslaver
 that, with the holy feet (of our Lord)—
 which pressed down the Kailash mountain,
 crushing the shoulders of the mighty Raakshasaa
 of esteemed prowess—
 enthroned on my head,
 I am raising a din,
 in the joy of having no longer in me
 any the least of the resurgent *pasu paasam* nature?

7*

Is it not through (eternal) communion
 with the Thillai Enslaver
 that he **planted** on my head

6. i. Kaazhi Thaandavaraayar interprets the word *kombu* in this stanza as a 'woman'. This interpretation gains support from the phrase *kombanaiyaal* in the 10th stanza, which has been translated by me as 'a flower stalk-like one'.

6. ii. 'floret'—a small flower, a bud just turning into flower, but not yet fully blown out. It is called *podhu* in Tamil. It is considered the most acceptable form of flower for worship. The full blown flower is called *malar*.

7. i. 'mighty Raakshasaa'—Raavanaa.

7. ii. '*pasu paasam*'—*pasu*—creature; *paasam*—the three congenital *malams* that taint the soul. Our mystic intends to say that the second and third items of the coeval and eternal *triad* *pathi*, *pasu*, *paasam*, viz., are, as far as he is concerned, dead and that he is now *pathi* only i. e., he is God, "God living in God" (see 3rd paragraph on page 79).

His holy feet which walked in the forest
 behind the rooting black burly boar,
 and subdued the tyranny
 of the carnal five of over-powering might ?

8*

Is it not through (eternal) communion
 with the Thillai Enslaver
 that I, who was profitlessly tilling a barren field,
 came across a treasure trove of gold
 by virtue of *thavam* of the past,
 and was able to serve
 the Caivan of red lotus-like feet
 with my contemptible head ?

9*

Is it not through (eternal) communion
 with the Thillai Enslaver, the Mother,
 that right here He **rids me**
 who, with a pure mind, am performing
 holy services to the Partner
 of the slender flower-stalk-like One
 with the tightly laced buxom breasts—
 of **all the fruits of Karma**
 which the present life yields.

10*

Thiruchchitrambalam.

8. i. 'feet which walked in the forest behind the boar'—refers to an incident in the *Mahaabhaaratham*. Arjunaa was performing austerities to gain *paasupathaasthram*, a weapon of magical powers, from Civan. A *raakshasaa* called *Mookaasuran* wanted to divert the mind of Arjunaa from his *tapas* and took the form of a boar to do so. Lord Civan, however, came in the guise of a hunter and chased the boar out of the precincts of Arjunaa's ashram.

8. ii. 'cruel five'—the five senses.

9. 'Caivan'—Brahmin; here, Civan who came as a Brahmin at Thirupperunthurai.

10. 'all the fruits of Karma which the present life yields'—*aagamya karma*. Please refer to the poem quoted in the note to stanza 3 of this decad.

41. ARRPUTHAPPATHTHU

Inability to Sustain the Experience

(Sung at Thirupperunthurai)

Arrputhappaththu is a composite word made up of *arrputham* (miracle) and *paththu* (decad) *Arrputham* is a corruption of the Sanskrit word *Adhbhutham* (miraculous thing or occurrence). The sub-title is clear enough.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

I would fain describe the miracle
of my Lord revealing Himself as an embodied One
and standing before me
displaying His twin golden feet,
and bestowing grace on me
that my wisdom may not stumble
by my being deluded and engulfed on this earth
in the sea called (worldly) life
and by falling into the whirlpool called women,
and that I may forsake all unreality.

1

I would fain describe the miracle
of my Lord revealing Himself as a King
and standing before me
displaying His twin golden feet
lest, instead of strewing choice flowers
at His feet
and worshipping Him unceasingly,
I plunge head over heels
into a life of sorrow

and go along with comely women
of sandal paste-surfeited breast.

2

I cannot understand the miracle
of the rare Being sought for by the great Vedaas
catching hold of this slave, and confronting me
and giving me slap after slap
and forcibly feeding sugar to me —
me who, leading a life of pretence in this world
and performing many fraudulent things,
was roaming about
babbling a lot about past karma
out of a mouth scarred by the delusion
of I and mine.

3*

I cannot understand the miracle
of my Lord coming as a rare Succourer —
without parting from Her, His grace —
to the accompaniment of the tinkling *cilambu*
on the perfect rosy feet,
and enslaving me
who, thoughtless of the accruing births and deaths,
was going about uttering falsehoods,
and was lying stunned
by the eyes of women of dark tresses.

4*

3. 'sugar' — The word in the original is *akkaaram*. This word survives even today in a sweet rice preparation called *akkaara adisil*. *Adisil* means cooked rice. In the present context, *akkaaram* stands for divine bliss.

4. i. 'Her, His grace'—Sakthi, the grace aspect of the Godhead.

4. ii. It is interesting to note that the poet uses the word '*cilambu*' and not 'Kazhal', the anklet on the right foot. *Cilambu* is the ornament worn on the left ankle, the ankle of the female half of the form of Civan. It is the sound of this *cilambu* which contemplatives hear as a phenomenon when they are in the *nirvikalpa-samaadhi*.

I cannot understand the miracle
of my Lord making me dance with joy
by bestowing deliverance on me
and showing His soft blossom like anklet-girt feet
that my cruel karma may die out,
and of His entering my heart
and enslaving me—
me, who, consorting with wealth,
kith and kin, women,
and other avenues of enjoyment,
and overpowered by their inherent natures,
was wandering about revelling in them.

5

I cannot understand the miracle
of the attributeless and symbolless Sea of Grace
coming along with Her, the delicate Dame,
and uniting with me and graciously enslaving me—
me who, without giving a thought
to this repeatedly coming round birth and death,
was wandering about like a crazy fool
in the company of women,
immersed in the great flood
of the pleasure of their lips.

6

I cannot understand the miracle
of my Father coming and showing me His twin feet,
and graciously enslaving me—
me who, without picking suitable flowers
and unfailingly placing them
at the anklet-girt golden feet,
to the accompaniment of the chant of the five letters
in the prescribed manner,

was idling away my days overcome by the dark eyes
of women with buxom breasts.

7*

I cannot understand the miracle
of the Lord—incomprehensible to those
who would comprehend Him by noise—
ridding me of the twin deeds
which keep swaying my life and body,
bestowing experience on me and making me enlightened,
severing the grip of *paasams*,
fulfilling my desire
out of His lofty and surpassingly great mercy
and gathering me to the feet of His devotees.

8*

I cannot understand the miracle
of my Father showing me on this earth

7. 'five letters'—*Na-ma-ci-vaa-ya*.

8. i. 'noise'—The Tamil language classifies sound into two categories, viz., meaningless sound (*osai*) and meaningful sound (*oli*). Here Maanikkavaachakar contemptuously uses the word *osai* though he refers to spoken words. For God is not possible of being comprehended or being made comprehensible by words. See note to stanza 76 of decad 5 and relevant quotation from Aldous Huxley reproduced in Appendix III.

8. ii. '*paasams*'—the plural is used to indicate the three *malams* which constitute *paasam*.

8. iii. 'fulfilling my desire'—the phrase in the original is *aasai theerththu*. Commentators interpret this phrase to mean "extirpating desire". If this is the meaning of that phrase it would have been worded differently, such as "*avaa arruththu*". Granting that for the sake of prosody, the word *aasai* had to be used, yet the word *theerththu* normally means only "fulfilling" and not "extirpating". When we recall that Maanikkavaachakar's one desire—an overpowering desire—was to gain admission to the galaxy of devotees, it seems more natural to translate the phrase as "fulfilling my desire". Moreover, it fits in with the supplication which the Saint made in line 43 of the 1st decad, and the refrain in the stanzas of decad 26, *Athicaya-p-paththu*.

His fragrance-laden blossom like anklet-girt feet
 unattained by Vishnu and Brahmaa,
 and graciously enslaving even me—
 me who, lying supine in this jungle of a birth
 and doing things agreeable to vacuous women,
 am wandering in their company
 like a dog
 with a worm-infested head.

9

I cannot understand the miracle
 of God, our Lord, the infinite One,
 showing His twin feet to me
 and, bestowing gnosis on me
 and enslaving me —
 me who, without thinking of
 this thriving birth and death,
 was supinely lying here thinking only
 of deceitful and degrading things
 done by women with copious tresses
 and beautiful eyes
 like those of the *kendai* fish.

10

Thiruchchitrāmbalam

42. CENNIPPATHTHU

Intensification of Bliss

(Sung at Thirupperunthurai)

Cennipaththu is a composite word made up of *cenni* (head) and *paththu* (decad). All the stanzas of this decad have a refrain in which Maanikkavaachakar ecstatically declares that his head will eternally rest at

the feet of the Lord. The appropriateness of the sub-title can be felt in every word of every stanza. In Tamil, the sub-title is *Civa-vilaivu*, *Vilaivu* has among its several meanings the word *muthirvu* as well. This meaning has been adopted and translated as 'intensification' in consonance with the tenor of the preceding and succeeding decads.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrāmbalam

Our heads will eternally rest and sparkle
at the pure great flower of a rosy foot
of Devadevan, trustworthy Knight,
Lord of Perunthurai in the south,
primeval Bliss incarnate
unknowable by even the Trinity,
florescent Effulgence
unknowable by no matter who
unless they are devotees.

1*

Our heads will eternally rest and blossom
at the circular lotus-like rosy feet
of the Lord of eight aspects, the handsome One,
the Flood of sweet ambrosia-like bliss,
the high principled One, Reality,
Lord of the Land of Bliss,
the Knight of Perunthurai in the south,

1. 'Trinity'—Brahmaa, Vishnu, and Rudhraa.

1, i. 'sparkle'—with the light emanating from the feet of the Lord. Compare with opening lines of stanza 18 of decad 7.

1, ii. 'our heads'—it is clear from the 3rd stanza that these poems are addressed by Civakaami to her companions.

the beautiful One Who keeps on one side of Him
the Dame of long tresses smelling of honey.

2*

Oh damsels attend to me !

Our heads will eternally rest with distinction
at the honey-overflowing great flower of a rosy foot
of our Lord, He Who has commandeered our service,
the Knight abiding in Perunthurai
surrounded by cocoanut groves,
our Spouse,
He, Who, snatching the bangles
on the hands of us dames
and snatching our souls too
will impress us into His service.

3*

Our heads will (eternally) rest and blossom
at the flower-like large rosy feet
of the transcendently transcendent One
Who came down on earth as a Brahmin
surrounded by His devotees,
of Lord Civan, Who, surrounded by the enlightened ones,

2. i. 'the Lord of eight aspects'—they are earth, water, fire, wind, sky, sun, moon and the soul.

2. ii. 'circular lotus-like feet'—like a fully spread out big lotus. The rosy feet of the Lord are conceived as a lotus with the ten toes as petals thereof. The stance assumed by the feet reminds one of a circular pattern. Moreover, since God is conceived as facing all the points of the compass, the circular concept of the feet is not too strange a fancy.

3. 'snatching the bangles on the hands of us dames'—When Civan goes out in all His resplendent beauty to beg in the streets, housewives coming to give Him alms will be so struck by His beauty that they will instantaneously fall in love with Him and pine so much on the very spot that their bangles will slip down from their wrists into the begging bowl along with the alms.

dances in the ancient city of Thillai,
 of Him Who, coming as a trickster
 and, entering our homes, enslaves us
 and plants on our heads His feet
 with intent to take us into His service.

4*

Our heads will (eternally) rest and flourish
 at the perfect lotus-like large rosy feet
 of Him Who bestowed on me His grace
 that I may not esteem the delusive life
 taking it to be real,
 of Him, the partner of Uma
 of bamboo-like shapely shoulders,
 of Him, Who abides in our Thirupperunthurai,
 of Him, Who showed me those feet saying :

“Do behold these in your body
 with ambrosia welling up and welling up in it ”.

5

Our heads will (eternally) rest and blossom
 at the lotus-like large rosy feet of our Father
 Who, entering our minds
 and enslaving us, destroyed our evil karma,
 and bestowed on us
 the devout love necessary for our redemption,
 and Who, on our picking many flowers
 and placing them at His anklet - girt golden feet,
 will bestow deliverance on us
 and place us beyond all these three worlds.

6*

Our heads will (eternally) rest and flourish
 at the rosy feet

4 ‘our homes’ — our bodies.

6. ‘these three worlds’ — the earth, the heavens, and the nether-
 regions.

which showed the truly great prowess
of our Lord Who bestowed on me His great grace
that I may swim across this sea called birth,
and Who, taking pity on me as a destitute,
allowed me to enter the gracious galaxy of His devotees
and, securing for me good company, redeemed me. 7

Our heads will (eternally) rest and blossom
at the flower-like rosy feet
which never fail the devotees
who, with worshipping hands
and pure flower-like eyes brimming with tears,
keep repeating :

“ Oh beauty-invested Effulgence
Which eradicates the unreality
of this body chock-full of worms !
Oh our Eesan ! Oh our Lord ! Oh our Father ! ” 8

Our heads will (eternally) rest and flourish
at the lotus-like red golden great feet
of the lofty One Who, calling me
who was roaming about as a wastrel,
destroyed the enmity of potent karma,
Who, piercing through the world
stood on the other side,
Who, bestowing grace
on those who love Him,
lavishes bliss on His true devotees. 9

Oh devotees who wander about
singing the sacred names of the eternally free One—
the primal Effulgence,
the three-eyed Father,

the first Seed, the *Gneyam*,
 the Lord of the Land of Bliss—
 and come here and worship Him
 that your *paasam* may cease to be !
 Our heads will (eternally) rest
 and flourish at His rosy feet
 which fill my mind.

10*

43. THIRUVAARTHTHAI

Loving by Telling

(Sung at Thirupperunthurai)

Thiruvaarththai is a 'composite word made up of *Thiru* (sacred) and *vaarththai* (conversation). The Bride of the Lord converses with her companions and tells them of the name and fame of her Beloved. She declares that only those who appreciate the glory of her Beloved will be her masters. Sri Dhandapaani Dhesikar refers to the supplication of the companions of Civakaami in stanza 19 of decad 7 in which they pray : "let not our breasts join in embrace with the shoulders of anyone but your devotees" and concludes that the refrain in all the stanzas of this decad, viz., "only those who understand/appreciate/realise the grace and glory of our Lord will become our lords" is of the same nature as the supplication in stanza 19 of the 7th

10. 'Gneyam'—One of the trinomial term, viz., Gnaanam, Gnaathru and Gneyam. i. e., Knowledge or Gnosis, Knower, the Known, viz., the Brahman, the Godhead. The Godhead is called *Sat-Chit-Aanandam*. He is the Reality, He is the (One to be) Known, He is Bliss.

decad. We must, however, remember that the other supplication was made only by the companions of Civakaami and that Civakaami herself had nothing to do with it. / She could not have joined in that supplication as she wanted Lord Civan Himself as her spouse whereas her companions were (content to have the true devotees of Civan as their husbands.) After it has been agreed by all the commentators that Maanikka-vaachakar has assumed the role of the Bride of the Lord, it is sacrilegious to say at this stage that she declared that certain other persons will be acceptable as husbands for her or for her companions. We must, on the other hand, go to another stanza of decad 7—the 15th—where the companions of Civakaami, speaking of her state, say that “the heavenly ones’ feet she will never worship”, and interpret the refrain in this decad as substituting a positive statement for a negative one and saying that Civakaami will accept as her masters, her superiors, only those who have insight into and understanding of the grace and glory of her Lord. This refrain is on a par with Thirunavukkarasar’s declaration that even though certain people were lepers, eaters of the flesh of the cow etc., if they were devotees of Civan, they would be the gods whom he would worship. (Vol. 1 decad 1). In short, our mystic says that he is the slave of the slaves of the Lord and that he will accept them only as his superiors.

The sub-title is (*Arriviththu anburruthal*.) There are two ways of nurturing one’s love for someone. One way is the silent one of contemplating the name and fame of one’s beloved. The other way is the garrulous

one of telling all and sundry about the qualities of one's beloved. Our poet calls this *pithattral*, and in the 5th stanza of the next decad, we will hear him accusing himself of failing to babble about the glory of the Lord. This decad deals with feeding of one's love with loud praises of one's Beloved. Chapter 112 of the Thirukkural is cast in this method of feeding one's love.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

The Lord with a Dame-nestling side,
 a Chanter Who specialises in the Vedaas,
 Effulgence Which has taken abode
 in the great flower,
 transcendent Mercy without any shortcomings,
 Impartiality cherished by devotees,
 the pure One of Perunthurai
 surrounded by groves abounding in florets
 Who bestows grace
 with impartiality as His characteristic —
 those who can comprehend
 the graciousness in His coming down on earth
 and revealing His primal Godhead,
 they will be our masters.

1*

They will be our masters
 who can comprehend the **significance of our Lord**—

1. 'great flower' - the heart; one commentator interprets the term as the **sahasraaram** - a thousand petalled lotus - the highest of the focal points in the body for contemplation of God. It is said to be at the apex of the brain.

Who, on Vishnu and Brahmaa
 and the King of the heavenly ones
 coming and worshipping Him,
 bestowed grace on them—
 in coming down into this world
 and showing the right path to us,
 and, (moreover), in bestowing mercy
 on the artless good damsel
 in prosperous long established Idaivai
 with beautiful gem-set mansions
 that virtue may increase in her.

2*

The primal Being of bejewelled crown,
 King of the immortals, blissful Dancer,
 He Who made the six categories of religion
 -worship Him (alone),
 our magnanimous Dispenser of Grace at Perunthurai
 Who bestows grace on us
 to the detriment of the disease of birth,
 He, falling in love with a damsel,
 boarded a boat
 while heaven and earth stood by
 praising and adoring Him,
 and cast a fine mesh net for the great (*keliru*) fish.
 Those who understand the (esoteric) nature
 of this act of Him
 will be our masters.

3*

2. 'bestowing mercy on the .. damsel .. in Idaivai' — the incident to which the phrase refers is not known. 'Idaivai' is identified by commentators with Thiruvidadaimaruthoor, a village two miles from Kumbakonam. But there does not seem to be sufficient authority for this supposition. See also note in Appendix III.

3. 'falling in love ... fish' — refer to note to line 10 of decad 2.

They will be our masters
 who can understand the intrinsic nature
 of the enslavement of the whole lot of my companions
 on that day by great Lord Civan
 Who, assuming the form of a hunter,
 abode in Mahendra mountain
 while the heavenly ones of many grievances
 came in search of Him—
 our Sire, the primordial Being of Perunthurai
 Who came riding on the prancing horse
 having a mind to redeem us slaves. 4*

They will be our masters
 who can understand the intrinsic nature
 of the crossing of the surfy sea
 by our transcendental Lord,
 and of the bestowal of grace
 on the Dame with ball caressing soft fingers
 in Lankaa surrounded by towering ramparts
 by the primal Being of Perunthurai
 Who, while the heaven dwellers
 come and praise and adore Him,
 bestows grace on His devotees,
 verily like a vast Sea of grace,
 that their bonds (of *paasam*) may snap and fall off. 5*

4. 'of the whole lot' – in the original, the word is *engum* (every where), i.e., all over the world, wherever my companions were found. But the word 'that day' refers to the specific occasion at Thirupperunthurai when Lord Civan enslaved all those who were with Him on that occasion except Maanikkavaachakar whom He bade stay back (see lines 125 to 129 of decad 2). Therefore the present rendering.

5. 'Dame with fingers' – Vandothari, consort of Raavana, king of Lanka (see note to stanza 3 of decad 18).

They will be our masters
who can appreciate the **attitude of mind**
of our Father—
our Lord, the Archer
Who attacked the three cities
and made them burn—
in suckling the litter of piglings,
taking pity on an arrow stricken sow
which He found in the forest
in which He was roaming
in the guise of a hunter
surrounded by hunting dogs
and watched (from above) by the *devaas*
who do His bidding.

6

They will be our masters who can understand
the greatness of the Effulgence of great brilliance—
Our Eesan, our pure One of Perunthurai
of perennially blossoming groves
Whom the Dames with beautiful foreheads
residing on sound emitting goodly lotuses
praise and adore by strewing flowers at His feet—
in coming (down from heaven) and appearing on earth,
and bestowing grace on us,
thereby destroying our sense of separateness.

7*

7. i. 'Dames' - Lakshmi and Sarasvati, the goddesses of wealth and learning respectively, who are seated on pink and white lotus respectively.

7. ii. 'sound emitting lotuses' - the buzzing of bees inside the lotuses makes it appear as if the lotuses were emitting a sound.

7. iii. 'sense of separateness' - Thomas Merton says: "However, in all these things you remain very far from God, much farther than you realise. And there are always two of you. There is yourself and there is God making Himself known to you by these effects. But as long as there is this sense of separation, this awareness of distance and difference between ourselves and God, we have not entered into fulness of contemplation." For further elucidation, please read the full passage on pages 75 to 79.

They will be our masters
 who can understand the Person
 Who embraces the shoulders
 of the painted picture-like lovely Maid
 born out of fire among the great sea-faring people—
 the Person (Who is no other than)
 the Wearer of a lovely garland
 of *kondrai* flowers in full bloom,
 the brave One Who killed the mighty tiger
 of fighting claws,
 the Partner of the goodly dame Uma,
 the King of Thirupperunthurai in the south
 surrounded by flourishing groves,
 our Eesan of flawless great glory.

8*

They will be our masters
 who can understand **the divine will**
 of our mighty Lord bathed in pure white ash—
 the Effulgence,
 the Lord of Mahendra mountain,
 the Eesan Who, coming (of His own accord),
 placed (on my head) the feet which *devaas* worship,
 the Southerner, the Ruler of Perunthurai—
in showing His mercy to me,
in showing His anklet-girt feet to me
 while I, with increasing love, thawed and melted,

8. 1. 'lovely maid ... sea faring people' - Paarvathi; see note to line 10 of decad 2.

8. ii. 'mighty tiger' - certain *rishis* - ascetics - of Taarukaavanam, who were performing a sacrifice of black magic, were enraged with Civan and sent a tiger and an elephant, products of the sacrificial fire, to attack Civan and kill Him. Civan killed the beasts and wore their pelts as His loin cloth and upper garment respectively.

and in extirpating my misery
and graciously enslaving me

9*

They will be our masters
who can understand the mystery
of our Lord of beautiful eyes—
our great Lord of the immortals,
Ambrosia to His devotees,
our Lord Who came down to the earth,
the Ruler of Perunthurai, the clever One—
in arriving with merchandise that day
in Madurai teeming with damsels
and in snatching their bangles,
that their great *paasam* many cease
and that thay may gain bliss
here and in the hereafter.

10*

Thiruchchitrambalam

44. ENNAPPATHIKAM

Joy from Unceasing Bliss

(Sung at Thillai)

Ennappaththu is a composite word made up of *ennam* (thought) and *pathikam* (decad). This is a decad in which our mystic gives voice to his innermost thoughts, his aspirations.

The subtitle does not need any comments.

9. 'that day' — the day on which Civan came as a *guru* at Perunthurai.

10. i. 'arriving with merchandise in Madurai' — refers to an episode related in the 'Puraanam of the Lord's Sacred Frolics' Civan came as a seller of bangles to Madurai and stole the hearts of women while He was engaged in fitting bangles on their wrists. Toru Dutt, the young Bengali poetess, has written a beautiful poem on this episode.

10. ii. 'snatching the bangles' — stealing their hearts; see note to stanza 3 of decade 42.

No matter I do not have devotion,
no matter I do not worship You,
no matter I am not mad to see
Your anklet-girt noble soft feet,
no matter I do not babble about You,
do extirpate my birth, Oh our great Lord !
Oh pearl-like One ! Oh gem-like One !
Oh primal Being !
Crying : “ Is this just ? ”,
I will anyhow follow You
and will not bear any longer to be separated from You. 4
I have ceased seeing Your holy feet ;
I have ceased seeing them to the delight of my eyes
and cherishing them.
I have ceased babbling about You.
Moreover, Oh our great Lord,
Oh stable One, I have lost the capacity
to melt thinking of You ;
by my stupidity I have ceased seeing You.
Even if You come any more,
I would shrink from seeing You. 5
Oh my Owner ! Graciously say : “ Alas ”,
and take pity on me
that I, unrighteous one, may be consoled in my mind
by saluting You, our milk-white ash-smeared
transcendent One—
the Effulgence Who, coming forward
along with His transcendent Mercy,
and appearing before true devotees,
bestows on them the haven of grace—
by meditating on Him as my Ambrosia,

by adoring Him, by praising Him,
and hailing Him -
with loud lamentations.

Thiruchchitrambalam.

45. YAATHTHIRAIPPATHTHU

Relating the Transcendental Experience

(Sung at Thillai)

Yaththiraippaththu means the “Decad of the Journey”. This is the journey to Civan’s feet, the journey from which there is no return to the earthly life of birth and death. Maanikkavaachakar, sure of his own deliverance, invites all other mature devotees to join him in the journey.

The sub-title means Experience transcending all limitations. This kind of experience cannot be stated in precise terms but can be sensed from the behaviour and utterances of a person living through that experience. The assurance with which Maanikkavaachakar invites all other devotees is in itself evidence of the transcendent experience and an expression of the same.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

Oh you who have been called up
by the Flood of grace, our King,
Whose head is profusely decked with flowers—
the mighty Lord with the snakes for ornaments,
the Flood of grace Which
unceasingly mingling with the heart of us paltry ones,

dissolves it into Experience—

Oh You Who have been so called up
and have lovingly become His slaves,
come and gather together.

Behold ! The time has come to go--leaving the unreal--
and enter the haven of the feet of our Owner. 1

Don't you get entangled in the senses.
Think exclusively about the feet
of the great Lord adorned with snakes.
Let go all the totally unnecessary things.
(For) those who have affiliated themselves
with the merciful One—

Who, openly entering the earth,
has enslaved curs like us—
will remain inflexible, self abiding in the Self. 2

God alone is their kin ;
they are a law unto themselves.
Who are we? What is ours? What is this *paasam*?
What a delusion are these !

To be rid of them,
join the ancient devotees of the King,
and, accepting His will as Your will,
set out on the path
leading to the golden feet
of the snake-adorned Dancer
Who will rid you of unreality
and enslave you. 3*

Oh all of you who have become His slaves !
Leave far behind this worldly game.
Come unto His fragrance laden feet ;

3. The first two lines define the perfect contemplatives.

keep watching for His divine will.
He will make this sin-ridden body drop off
and will establish us in the Land of Bliss.
The snakes-adorned One
of ash-laden body
will allow us to enter
(the haven of) His anklet-girt blossom-like soft feet. 4
Forsake anger and the disease called desire.
There is not much time any more.
Prepare yourself to go along
with the large caravan of devotees
to the feet of our Owner.
We will go and enter the City of Bliss
before its ornamented doors are closed.
Standing beside the Bhujangan
and melting with love, we will sing
the praises of Him Who enslaved us. 5
Praise the feet of the Bhujangan,
adorn them with flowers,
and, establishing them in your minds,
despise all troubles.
And that we may not henceforth meet with
any more obstacles,
let us go to the resplendent City of Bliss
and, worshipping the feet of Civan,
go before the devotees present there
and stand with melting heart. 6
Let them who wish to stay, stay.
We will no longer tarry in this impermanent world ;
we will go to the golden feet of Bhujangan,
the Enslaver with a form.

comparable in beauty unto itself only.

Oh all of you who are here !

Come and join just as you are without any delay.

If you stay back and are caught napping,
our great Lord will become rare of apprehension. 7

Oh you who have gained the privilege

of never staying parted

from the supreme bliss of our Lord !

Lest you get affected

by inescapable delusion

and, later, wail in distress,

let us enter the City of Bliss

even while its gem-studded sacred doors are open

and join holy Bhujangan's holy feet

which Vishnu does not know. 8:

With intent to reach (the City of Bliss),

concentrate your thoughts on it

and contemplate (His feet).

Drinking in to your heart's content

the ambrosia of grace of Bhujangan—

the Partner of Her

with eyes like spears flashing on the battle field—

plunge (into the pool of bliss) with surging ardour.

Desire ardently to reach Civan's anklet-girt feet

without wallowing in unreality. 9

Oh you who do not come forward today itself

and, rolling on the ground

and praying and praising the Lord,

become slaves !

Oh you deluded ones !

Who will respect you any longer ?

Oh you who, with your wits in a whirl,
are confused !

If you would gain clarity of mind, do this.

Who can (otherwise) gain the grace
of the King of the World of Bliss—
the holy Bhujangan—

in this vast world ?

Ah ! Ah ! Ah me !

10*

Thiruchchitrambalam

46. THRUPPADAIEZHUCHCHI

The War on the World

(Sung at Thillai)

The title means ' Mobilisation of the Holy Army '.
Neither the title nor the sub-title needs any explanation. This decad has only two stanzas.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

Beat the cosmic-sound emitting drum
of our Chieftain Who wields the sword of gnosis ;
hold aloft the moon-like white umbrella
of our mighty Chief Who rides the most mighty bull.
Don all of you
the blessed armour of sacred ash ;
let us capture the heavenly city
before the forces of delusion arrive.

1*

10. 'do this' - i.e., come forward today itself and rolling on the ground, praying and praising the Lord, become His slaves.

1. i. 'cosmic sound' - The Onkaaraa.

1. ii. 'heavenly city' - The City of Bliss.

Oh Servitors of the Lord !

Go forward as the vanguard ;

Oh Devotees ! March on the flanks ;

Oh Yogins of resplendent prowess !

March as the main mighty army !

Oh Siddhaas of granite might !

Form the rear guard !

We shall rule over the land of the dwellers

of the spheres,

and prevent the army of sorrow from approaching it. 2

Thiruchchitrambalam

47. THIRUVENBAA

**Characteristics of Those Who have Mystic Union
with the Godhead.**

(Sung at Thirupperunthurai)

Thiruvēnbaa is a composite word made up of *Thiru* (sacred) and *venbaa*, a form of metrical composition of four lines with a caesura at the end of the 2nd line just before the last word, dividing the stanza into two distinctive parts of self-contained matter, with, however, a thread of reasoning which links the first half with the second half. This kind of composition is considered a very difficult one. There is an economy of words and an incisive method of expression about this type of verse which make it very suitable for didactic poetry:

This decad is so called since it is composed of stanzas of *venbaa* pattern. The 19th and the 48th decads too are formed of this type of verse, but they are called by other names.

The subtitle is clear enough and can be traced easily in the contents of the stanzas.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrāmbalam

For cruel karmas two to burn and vanish
what can I do by merely pining away ?
Falsehood will not thereby turn to dust.
The perfectly beautiful Lord of Perunthurai—
the honey-exuding Fire—

I failed to harbour in my mind.

I*

Whoever will tell me
that it is only the Lord of Perunthurai—
the Father—

Who can make me intoxicated with ineradicable bliss,
shall I humbly hail them boisterously,
or cry incoherently,
or dance round them or sing or stare at them ;
what shall I do,

Oh transcendently transcendent One ?

2

I do not know the mistake made by me.

I do not know the fundamentals
of the way of redemption

1. i. The lamentation in this stanza should not be confused with the lamentations in decad 5 — the lamentations of the Purgative Way. This is a lamentation of the Unitive Way. Here, in his over-powering desire to die, to shed his body—when alone the play of the *praarabdha karma* will cease — Maanikkavaachakar accuses himself of having failed to harbour the Godhead in his mind.

1. ii. 'karmas two' — good and evil deeds, that portion of one's past karma which must be lived out in a birth. *Praarabdha karma* ceases only with death. See note to line 20 of decad 1 in Appendix III and note to stanza 3 of decad 39.

through ever worshipping His rosy feet only
with my hands.

Yet, the Lord abiding in Perunthurai,
coming and living in the world,
thrust His sword (of gnosis) deeply into my mind
as if He were thrusting it into its sheath. 3*

The great Dispenser of grace,
Who severs future births,
stood before me, having extirpated the root
of my past karmas two.

The Southerner, the great Dispenser of mercy
Who abides in Perunthurai
is the Medicine which will do away with
the oncoming sorrow. 4*

I declare to those who want to know :
The all-pervading Lord—
the Great one Who abides in Perunthurai,
by Whom the chanter of the Vedaas,
he who created the entire world,
and Vishnu are confounded—

3. i. Maanikkavaachakar says : "It is true that the Lord pierced me by his sword of gnosis. Nevertheless, I went wrong somewhere."

3. ii. 'sword (of gnosis)' - the word in the original is *vel* - spear. But spears have no sheaths. Moreover, the term commonly used is 'sword'. See stanza 1 of decad 46. Therefore, I have rendered the word as sword. It is possible that the word was *vaal* and had been erroneously transcribed in manuscripts as *vel*.

4. i. Note the change in the tenor of the verses.

4. ii. 'past karmas two' - *sanchitha* karma, good or bad.

4. iii. 'oncoming sorrow' - *aagamyā* karma. See note to line 20 of decad 1 in Appendix III

will now stay permanently in my heart
without departing from it.

5*

My Father, the Lord of Perunthurai,
the Medicine which, enslaving me,
looks on me with great grace,
the undying great Bliss,
will make me god-mad ; He will sever my birth ;
and, coming into my mind,
will make it ineffably intoxicated (with bliss).

6

The Light (of gnosis) effused by the Lord
of eminently holy Perunthurai in the south,
the unique One who has occupied my mind,
bestowed the path of no return on me,
and, coming without any recompense,
became for me unsatiating bliss.

7*

Oh Lord superior to everyone
and of immeasurable renown !
To You who steeped me—
a slave inferior to everyone—
in bliss never gained by anyone else,
Oh my Lord and Lord of us all,
I do not know the way
to make a requital.

8

5 'chanter of the Vedaas, he who created the entire world',—
Brahmaa.

7. i. The word *maarrindri* in the original has been rendered by me as "without any recompense". Commentators interpret the word to mean "without any conflict or disagreement or enmity with me". But, nowhere in all the preceding 622 stanzas has our mystic expressed a similar thought whereas he has deplored on several occasions his unrequitable indebtedness to God. God is never in conflict with man. It is man who is in conflict with God. My rendering is supported by the next stanza.

Bliss will increase in one's body
on worshipping the anklet-girt far reaching feet
of Civan

Who rode a horse
and came down on earth—
He Who is not seen by the Three,
the Thirty-three and the *devaas* besides.

Oh my heart ! Contemplate only the twin feet
of Him Who patiently enslaved me
and beg of Him.

Note that The Dispenser of great mercy
Who abides in Perunthurai
will come into my mind
in the shape of a Medicine
and give you everything (you desire for).

10*

Increasing bliss and dispelling darkness,
severing for ever misery's link with me,
and setting up love in me,
the Lord of glorious Perunthurai,
in the shape of an Effulgence,
has rejoicingly taken possession of my mind
as His city.

11

Tiruchchitrambalam.

9. i. 'The three' — Brahmaa, Vishnu and Rudhran.

9. ii. the 'thirty - three' - they comprise eleven *Rudhraas*, twelve *Aadhithiyaas* (suns), the two *Aswini devaas* and eight *Vasus*.

9. iii. 'horse' - horse of gnosis.

10. 'and give you everything' - compare with the 2nd line of stanza 6 of decad 33.

48. PANDAAYA NAANMARRAI

Declaring the Indubitability of the Experience
(Sung at Thirupperunthurai)

Pandaaya Naanmarrai means the Ancient Four Vedaas. This decad takes its title from the opening words of the first stanza even as *Eesaa* and *Kena* Upanishads take their names from the opening word of their first verse. The sub-title is clear enough.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

The ancient four Vedaas cannot approach Him.
Vishnu and Brahmaa have not seen Him.
Tell me, Oh my heart! Is there anything
we can do in return to our King of Kokazhi
Who has graciously accepted base me as His servitor? 1
Praise Perunthurai where abides the munificent One —
Who came mounted on a horse—
Who bestows on us a great flood of gushing honey
(of grace)
that the three *malams* inherent in us may perish.
On praising it, even the very seeds
of the forest of births will perish. 2*
Oh heart! That your delusion may perish,
praise the lotus-like beautiful feet
of the Hunter in the forest—
He who lives by casting the net in the sea,
the Rider on the horse in the city, the Lord of Perunthurai,
Who, destroying our (*sanchita*) karma, bestows grace on us. 3

2. This stanza is addressed by Maanikkavaachakar to his companions.

Our Kinsmen who befittingly adore
 beauty-abounding Perunthurai—
 where the immortals go and gather
 to pray and praise—
are the only people who live their lives ;
 they alone will exterminate their potent karma ;
 and they alone are fit
 for the world to adore in humility.

4*

Remembering the King of eminent Kokazhi,
 approach Perunthurai that impediments may quit,
 and behold Him
 Who along with Her of musical speech
 is established there eternally without leaving it.

5*

Oh my heart ! Praise to your mouth's content
 Him Who never departs from Perunthurai —
 the great One Whom those devotees
 who cherish all their organs of perception
 as tools for gaining supreme bliss
 behold that their births may quit them.

6

Cherishing the feet of the goodly Medicine
 in my mind,
 and uttering the gem of a word
 of the ineffable flawless Gem—

4. i. This stanza means to say that other people do not live but vegetate.

4. ii. ' Our Kinsmen ' — people who are of our coterie. Worshipers of Civan are the only relatives to devotees. God too recognises them only as His chosen people, His kin.

5. i. This stanza is addressed to the heart.

5. ii. ' impediments ' — to gaining deliverance from birth.

the object of everything I speak—

I said : “ Oh Perunthurai ! “ and severed my birth. 7*

Thiruchchitrambalam

49. THIRUPPADAIYAATCHI

The Cessation of the Passion of the Soul

(Sung at Thillai)

Thiruppadaaiyaatchi is a composite word made up of *Thiru* (sacred), *padai* (weapon, army, and, here, in a special sense, battle or war) and *aatchi* (rule, subduing, and, in an extended sense, victory). We may render the title as Victory in the Sacred War. This is the war of the soul against the three *malams* or taints, viz., *aanavam* (ignorance), *kanmam* (karma) and *maayai* (matter). In this decad, Maanikkavaachakar sings in the role of the Bride of the Lord.

The sub-title is *Jeevopaadhi Ozhithal*, a phrase made up of two words derived from Sanskrit and one from Tamil. *Jeeva* means soul. *Upaadhi*, according to the dictionary, means fraud ; deceit ; trick ; deception ; disguise (in Vedaantaa) ; discriminative property, attribute or peculiarity, which is of four kinds, viz., *jaathi* (caste), *guna*

7. i. ‘ gem of a word ’ — the mystic five letter word, CI-VAA-YA NA-MA.

7. ii. ‘ the object of everything I speak ’ — Compare with the opening lines of stanza 24 of decad 5.

7. iii. ‘ Oh Perunthurai ’ — The reference here is not to the place called Perunthurai but to Lord Civan Who is the *Perum-thurai* — the Great Haven.

7. iv. This is a very significant stanza, coming as it does before the decad of Cessation of the Passion (suffering) of the Soul, and ending as it does with a positive and assertive statement, viz., “ I severed my birth ”

(qualities, characteristics), *kriya* (action) and *samgya* (soul-consciousness). *Upaadhi* means also *avachchedak gun dharma*, i. e. law of separatistic tendency. *Ozhithal*, a Tamil word, means "cessation". We may, therefore, take the sub-title to mean cessation of the deception on the soul or riddance of the attributes imposed on it by association with the *malams*, attributes which keep it aloof from the Godhead, or eradication of the tendency to remain aloof from the Godhead, all of which can be summed up, rather inadequately, of course, in the way I have rendered the sub-title, viz., "Cessation of the Passion of the Soul". Though, for purposes of translation, I have used the word 'passion' (suffering), the reader should read into this word all the different meanings given above to the word *upaadhi*. I am well aware that I am blindly stumbling about to convey the significance of this decad, and its sub-title in inadequate words with narrow limitations of meaning. But who, indeed, can imprison in words the ineffable freedom—the "pure freedom indistinguishable from infinite freedom". I shall conclude this note with a quotation from Jalal-ud-din Rumi, the great Persian mystic of the 13th century. "‘I am God’" says Rumi, "is an expression of great humility. The man who says ‘I am the slave of God’ affirms two existences, his own and his God's, but he that says ‘I am God’, has made himself non-existent and has given himself up and says ‘I am God’, i. e., ‘I am naught, He is all, there is no being but God's’. This is the extreme of humility and self-abasement."

In this decad, in its eight stanzas of what looks like delirious ravings, Maanikkavaachakar says, in no uncer-

tain terms, what has been said thousands of years ago in the famous *mahaavaakyam* (great utterance) of the Sama Vedaa—*Aham Brahmaasmi*, I am Brahman. Several centuries later to Maanikkavaachakar, Rumi asserts the same in the 13th century, and, seven centuries thereafter, Thomas Merton, in the 20th century, speaks of 'God living in God' (see note to stanza 4 of decad 31). Every type of experience—creature experience—is completely done away with in the state of union which this decad describes. The purport of this decad is to say "Now that we are God, we have done away with all the joys and sorrows, the problems and puzzlements, the temptations and travails of the world".

The following passage from Plotinus very aptly summarises the theme of this decad. Plotinus says :

"When a man enters a house rich in beauty he might gaze about and admire the varied splendour before the master appears; but, face to face with that great person.....he would ignore everything else and look only at the master. In this state of absorbed contemplation there is no longer question of holding an object; the vision is continuous so that seeing and seen are one thing; object and act of vision have become identical: of all that until then filled the eye no memory remains. And our comparison would be closer if instead of a man appearing to the visitor who has been admiring the house it were a god, and not a god manifesting to the eyes but one filling the soul."

The Decad**Thiruchchitrambalam**

These two eyes shall no longer delight in the vision
 of His anklet-girt feet ;
 my life shall not be degraded
 by association with the life of ensnaring women.
 Even by oversight I shall not be reborn in this world.
 Neither shall I any longer worship the twin feet
 which Vishnu had never known ;
 nor shall I indulge in song and dance
 set to exhilarating tunes.

I shall no longer sing of the victories
 of Him Who has Paandinaadu for His domain ;
 no longer shall the mystic powers,
 which the heaven-dwellers delight in,
 exhibit themselves in me.
 None of these shall be when the divine Fisherman,
 Who of old cast the net, shall arise in me. 1

One with one and five with five
 will no longer have any existence ;
 there will be no redemption on the basis of a claim
 that we are the slaves of the slaves of Your slaves ;
 no longer will there be the relationship

(between us)

of Your materialising like a cow reminded of its calf ;
 the beginningless taints—the cause for birth—
 will no longer obtrude on our thoughts ;
 the terror arising from thinking

‘this is good and this is bad’
 will not occur any more ;
 no longer shall we desire to go to You
 along with all the other devotees ;
 there will nevermore be any question of gaining
 the transcendent Ambrosia which monopolises my love ;
 if the Owner of the bull,
 my Spouse Who has me for slave,
 enters me.

2*

The differentiating characteristics
 (imposed on the soul)

by *paasam* will no longer come and go ;
 the Godhead will no longer appear
 as a concept in my thoughts and turn to ambrosia ;
 the infinite universe will no longer
 be contained in us ;
 there will be no question of approaching
 the transcendent Flame—the primal Mystery ;
 no longer will there be the problem of the riddance
 of the dangers of women with coral red lips ;
 our eyes which are like those of the *sel* fish
 will no longer delight in His holy form ;

2. i. ‘ One with one ’ — body and soul

2. ii. ‘ five with five ’ — five sense-organs and five senses

2. iii. ‘ relationship ’ — in the original, the word is *kanakku* i. e.,
 account, a transaction.

2. iv. ‘ the beginningless taints ’ — the three *malams*.

2. v. ‘ desire to go to You...devotees ’ refers to **Maanikkavaachakar**
 being bidden to stay behind while all the other devotees went with the
 Lord (see lines 127 to 131 of decad 2).

the dangers of the deluding sorrow of birth
 will no longer rise ;
 if Eesan, my Bridegroom, will appear before me. 3*
 My bejewelled breasts will not adorn His chest
 and rejoice,
 I will no longer sport with delight
 in His boundless great sea of mercy ;
 the sound of the goodly bell will not vibrate
 and come to settle in my mind ;
 I will not eternally crave for the sacred ash
 worn by my Beloved ;
 I will not compete with the assembled devotees
 to be foremost in service to Him ;
 there will be no worshipping of the blossom feet
 unknown to even the great Vedaas ;
 my head will not gain
 (the privilege of having planted on it)
 the sweet-natured red *kazhuneer* blossom, His feet ;
 if the great Lord, Eesan, the Lord of mercy,
 Who owns me will graciously rise in me. 4*

3. i. 'differentiating characteristics' — the individuality imposed by *paasam* on the soul which is thereby separated from the Godhead.

3. ii. 'The infinite universe' etc., — please refer to the quotation from the Chandogya Upanishad reproduced as a note to line 35 of decad 1, where it is said : "as far, verily, as this (world) space extends, so far extends, the space in the heart. Within it, indeed, are contained both heaven and earth, both fire and water, both sun and moon, lightning and the stars. Whatever there is of Him in this world and whatever is not, all that is contained within it."

3. iii. 'our eyes like those of the *sel* fish' — It is clear from this that Maanikkavaachakar thinks not only of himself but also of all his companions as women, which notion is confirmed by the last line of this stanza. See also the opening lines of the next decad.

4. 'The sound of the goodly bell' — This phrase refers to the phonic phenomenon which contemplatives experience.

The delusion devised deliberately by *Maayaa* on earth
 will no longer confound me ;
 I will not worship the blossom feet
 not known by even the heavenly ones ;
 the perplexity arising down all the merciless ages
 will no longer occur again ;
 the minds of the loving devotees
 will not exult today ;
 the differences of female, neuter, male, and we,
 will no longer occur ;
 the mishaps of numerous births
 of which the names even are not known
 will not occur any more ;
 numberless mystic powers will not come and enter me ;
 if the great Lord who owns me—
 Eesan, the Bestower of grace—
 will graciously rise in me.

5*

The sacred ash will no longer shine
 on the holy Form of golden hue ;
 rain of flowers will not shower
 from the cupped hands of great contemplatives ;
 the designs of women
 with lightning-like slender waists
 will not become overt ;
 the delight from the sound rising melodiously
 out of the *veenai* will not become overpowering ;

5. i. the phrases, *mayakkarrumaakaathe*, *kalakkarrumaakaathe* and *pinakkarrumaakaathe* at the end of lines 1, 3 and 5 respectively in the original have been taken either as corruptions or errors in transcription by ancient copyists of *mayakku urrumaakaathe*, *Kalakku urrumaakaathe* and *pinakku Urrumaakaathe* respectively. The word 'urru' in these words are contractions of *urruthum*.

the feet of His devotees
will not flourish on my head ;
we, His devotees, will not rush forward
for immediate redemption ;
sweet musical instruments will not sweetly play,
filling everywhere with sweet sound ;
if Eesan Who has me for slave since long—
my Father—will graciously rise in me.

6

The ineffable pure sound of the bell
will no longer give its savour ;
the Effulgence Which had established itself
suddenly in my mind
will no longer continue to appear there ;
the transcendently transcendent One
Who came into my mind,
terminating its ranging over diverse things,
will no longer come again ;
the transcendent experiences
never known in the past
will no longer pervasively rise in me ;
the infatuation with bow-like arched goodly brows
(of women) will not occur today ;
the superb Being
not known by even the heaven-dwellers
will no longer become a demonstrable Being ;
I can no longer gain
the boundless eight attributes of the Lord ;

if He Who wears the moon as a gem on His head
will graciously rise to enslave us.

7*

The melodiously rising sound of massed conches
will not flourish any more ;

the characteristics never forsaken by caste
will no longer influence us ;

the delusion of

“ this is good there ”, “ this is good (here) ”

will not abide in our minds ;

we will no longer say :

“ All our desire is just to call ourselves

the slaves of His slaves ” ;

thoughts of women with bright eyes

like those of the red *kayal* fish

will not flourish in our minds ;

the experience of civanhood by devotees

will no longer be obvious ;

there will no longer be any reaching

for the transcendent Flame

Which, filling everywhere, exudes ambrosia ;

if the mystic One, Whose beginning or end we know not,

will graciously rise in me to enslave me.

8*

Thiruchchitrabalam

7. i. ‘ sound of the bell ’ — see note to stanza 4

7. ii. ‘ gain the boundless eight attributes ’ — contemplatives ultimately become God in every way including the eight attributes but, nevertheless, do not have the power to create, sustain, and destroy.

7. iii. ‘ a demonstrable Being ’ — a Being of Whom it can be said “ This is His form, this One is He ”. When there were two, viz., the Bride of the Lord and the Lord — the Bridegroom — it was possible to say this. (see stanza 7 of decad 20.) But when soul-consciousness has given place to civan-consciousness, this is no longer possible.

8. ‘ sound of conches ’ — see note to stanza 4

50. AANANDA MAALAI
Desire for Experience of Bliss
(Sung at Thillai)

Aananda-maalai is a composite word. *Aanandam* means bliss. *Maalai*, is really the word *maal* to which *ai* has been added as a suffix called *saariyai* in Tamil. *Maal* means desire. Therefore, the title and sub-title mean the same thing. *The Thiruvaachakam*—the handbook of mystical theology ends with the 49th decad. the 50th and 51st decads are of the nature of an Epilogue.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

Those who have reached
the blossom feet, beautiful like lightning,
they all have gone beyond the vast world ;
all the immortals stand worshipping You
with flowers beautiful like gold.
Tell me how someone like me—
who, possessing a mind like a stone,
has been spurned as a base one,
and has fallen into the sea of misery—
may now unite with You.

1

You gave me a status not understood by me ;
without appreciating it, I have been ruined.
It is none of Your fault.
Oh my Owner,
I ask You,
who am I to be a slave unto You ?

Without joining with the ancient devotees
 who serve and worship You since long,
 Oh my Spouse, I have tarried behind,
 a feast to disease.

2.

When is this wretch to join You
 Who enslaved me —

me, *sans* merit, *sans* disciplines,
sans ardour, *sans* wisdom,
 me, who had been whirling round in a dance
 like that of a puppet-show doll made of skin,
 and now lie here exhausted ?

When is this wretch to join You Who enslaved me
 by showing me how to get god-intoxicated,
 by showing me the way to reach You,
 by showing me Your form that I may ascend the path
 to the land from which there is no return.

3.

I, a reprobate, am going to ruin just as I should ;
 Oh ruinless One !

You took the blame.

I shall suffer, but if I suffer all that I have to suffer,
 then, what is the use (of Your grace) ?

Oh Gem of a *Guru* Who prevents me
 from sinking into the cruel great hell
 and enslaves me !

If You fail to be impartial, is that good,
 Oh our Master ?

4.

Oh You Who gives me Your breast as a mother !

If You fail to give (Your breast),
 shall I — a cur — perish as a *savalai* ?

Trusting You, I have sought Your feet, saying :
 “At least now give me (Your breast).”

Have You no pity for me ?

You accepted this cur's slavery along with the rest ;
am I unacceptable to You now ?

5*

Oh King ! Should You not bestow grace on me ?

Will it end in this wicked one being ruined ?

If You will not say : " Ah ! Ah ! ",

who is there, indeed, to tell me : " Don't fear " ?

Are all those who perish (without Your grace)
of my standard ?

Won't the devotees say

that this is undeserved in my case ?

Oh God ! Oh Dancer in Thillai !

I am perplexed ;

will You not at least now console me ?.

6*

Oh Lord of Perunthurai,

Who, transforming foxes into horses

suitable as mounts (for the cavalry),

performed a miracle

and perplexed the entire Madurai

of the great Paandiyan !

Oh rare Being ! Oh imperishable Father !

Oh Flood of Paandi !

Oh transcendent Effulgence rare of being known !

I do not know what to do !

7*

Thiruchchitrāmbalam

5. ' *savalai* ' — a child whose mother has become pregnant long before the period of nursing of the child in arms is over, and whose milk has consequently dried up leaving the poor child in arms to waste away as a rickety child.

6. ' Are all those standard ? — This question should be regarded to mean : " Am I to be classed among all those who die without Your grace ? " '

7. ' Flood ' — Flood of grace.

51. ACHCHO-PATHIKAM

Not Knowing How the Experience Came

(Sung at Thillai)

Achcho is a word of exclamation expressing astonishment at one's good fortune. This is therefore the Decad of Amazement. Amazement, says the dictionary, is 'astonishment mingled with wonder'. We may add, 'and gratitude'. The sub-title is only an expansion of the word "achcho" into intelligible words. We may recall to mind the words of Thomas Merton in the long passage quoted on pages 75 to 79. He said: "When the next step comes, you do not take the step, you do not know the transition, you do not fall into anything. You do not go anywhere, and so you do not know the way by which you got there.....". One word used in the sub-title in the original is *vazhi*, i. e. way. Literally translated the sub-title will read: "Not Knowing the Way by Which the Experience Came".

The refrain "*achchove*" has been omitted in the translation.

The Decad

Thiruchchitrambalam

Teaching the path of devotion to me
who was laboriously striving
in the company of cussed men
who did not know the way to liberation,
and ridding my mind of the original taint
that my ancient karma may cease to be,
and transforming me into bliss,
my Father assumed lordship over me.

Who else indeed could gain such a privilege
which my Father in His grace vouchsafed me ? 1*

Who else, indeed, could gain the grace
bestowed on me that I may see
the dance of the Dancer without symbol
so that I, who am mistaking the path
which is no path as the (right) path,
may not go into bye-paths
but may reach
the holy Grace only. 2*

Who else, indeed, could gain the grace
which my Sire,
preventing me from perishing (ignominiously)—
me who, mistaking all unreality for Reality,
was destined to remain infatuated
with the pleasures of women with close-set breasts—
bestowed on me
that I may reach only the feet
of the Lord
Who has a Dame on His left ? 3

1. i. 'that my ancient karma may cease to be' — please recall to mind that the poet said in the 20th line of the 1st decad that he will relate the Civapuraanam for the effacement of all his past karma (*sanchitha karma*). This wish has now been fulfilled.

1. ii. 'transforming me into bliss' — The word in the original for bliss is *Civam*. *Civam* is to be differentiated from *Civan*. *Civam* is the quality of *Civan*. *Civam* is bliss, pure and simple. The passage quoted from Thomas Merton in the note to stanza 4 of decad 31 explains what this matter of being transformed into bliss means.

2. i. 'path' — Code of conduct, way of apprehending the God-head

2. ii. 'Grace' — the embodiment of Grace, the Godhead.

Who else, indeed, could gain the grace
 bestowed on me by the eminent One
 Who bestowing inconceivable grace on me—
 me who was fit only to be born on this earth
 and, wearied with life, drop down dead—
 and, enslaving me,
 applied His sacred white-ash on even me
 that I may reach the pure path only ?

4

Oh my Owner, I, who would have been standing about
 with grief swelling in my heart,
 having fallen into trouble by the side-long glances
 of women with cotton - like soft feet,
 gained Your grace and am redeemed.
 Who else, indeed, could gain the grace
 bestowed on me by You saying :
 “ Come here ; don't fear ” ?

5

Who else, indeed, could gain the grace
 of the Lord bestowing on me
 the termination (of the cycle of births and deaths)
 by severing the bonds (of *paasam*)
 and by extirpating my faults
 that my innate nature of soul-consciousness may cease,
 and by ultimately enslaving me—
 me who, thinking that birth in this body
 which is liable to burn and perish is real,
 was multiplying my karma
 and was about to fall for the cup-shaped breasts
 of women of fragrant tresses and conch bangles ?

6

Who else, indeed, could gain like me the grace
 of my Sire Who, after patiently rescuing me

who was about to stoop for
 and fall for the charms of women,
 and after removing the fetters called *paasam*,
 showed me the path of redemption
 and bestowed on me
 the esoteric meaning of Onkaaraa? 7

Who else, indeed, could gain the grace
 bestowed on me by the Source of everything
 that I may reach the anklet-girt feet
 of the Lord with a Dame as one part of Him—
 I who, floundering in the wide whirlpool
 called death and birth,
 was about to sink through overpowering lust
 in the embraces of beautifully jewelled women? 8

Who else, indeed, could gain like me the grace
 bestowed on me by the **primal Being**—
 the Source of everything, my Mother—
Who, severing my bonds of the three *malams*
 and making even me a thing of worth—
 me who was wandering in the company of dunces
 who did not know the benefits of deliverance—
made this cur ascend the palanquin?

Thiruchchitrambalam

FINIS.

9. i. 'deliverance' — the word in the original is *semmai*.
 It means perfection, and, by inference, stands here for deliverance.

9. ii. 'palanquin' — *palki* i. e., a litter.

APPENDIX III

NOTES

Decad 1, line 20—‘karma’ or, to be more precise, fruits of karma, i. e., of deeds good and bad, go on accumulating birth to birth. It is like a savings bank account. When a man is born, he brings with him a part of the stored karma, even as he would take a part of the money in his bank account when he goes on a journey. This is called *praarabda* karma, and whosoever it may be, be he sinner or saint, he shall have to go through the experience of the fruits of this karma. So long as a man lives his life with desire for the fruits of his actions, he earns a new store of karma. This is called *aagamya* karma, i. e., accruing karma. This is added to the store of karma which has been left behind. That store is called the *sanchita* karma. A life lived without desire for the fruits of action, a life of total surrender of one’s body and soul and possessions as well to God ceases to earn any new karma. Moreover, that type of life liquidates the balance left behind, the *sanchita* karma. Thus, such a person becomes a released soul, released from the bonds of the cycle of births. In line 20, our sage means this type of emancipation. Also refer to note to stanza 3 of decad 40.

Decad 1, lines 46 to 48 ; ‘Oh our noble Lord they have now taken’—These lines are better rendered like this :

“ Oh our noble Lord Who,
like sweetness along with ghee

which are mixed imperceivably in freshly drawn milk,
are in the minds of common people,
but stand preeminently,
oozing honey (of bliss),
in the thoughts of Your devotees,
and sever the cycle of births
with the birth they have now taken !

D. 2, line 10—‘told to Uma’—Uma was Civan’s first disciple, rather an inattentive one. For this, she was cursed to be born as the daughter of a fisherman. Enraged by the severe punishment meted out to their mother, Ganesh snatched the scrolls of the *Aagamaas* and threw them into the sea while Murugan tore into pieces some of them. Lord Civan thereupon cursed Murugan to be born as a mute to a merchant in Madurai. Nandhi, the gatekeeper, for his negligence in admitting Ganesh and Murugan into the private chamber, was cursed to be changed into a shark and to roam about carrying on its back the *Aagamaas* thrown into the sea. Later, Civan appeared in the form of a fisherman and, after catching the *Keliru* fish which had run away with the *Aagamaas* thrown into the sea by Ganesh, redeemed Uma from the curse.

D. 2, lines 15–16 : ‘in the guise of a hunter’ – this refers to an incident in the *Mahaabhaarataa* in which Civan assumed the form of a hunter to bestow grace on Arjunaa who was engaged in deep contemplation of Him.

D. 2, line 20 : ‘five faces’—they are : (1) *Eesaanam*, of the colour of clear crystal (like the face of an

infant, says Maraimalai Adigal), facing north-east and situated on the top of the neck; (2) *tharrpurusham*, below *eesaanam*, golden, like the colour of the *kongu* flower, like the face of a youth, facing east; (3) *agoram*, the frightening aspect, with flowing beard and projecting teeth, of the mien of old people, dark in colour, situated above the right shoulder, facing south; (4) *vaamadevam*, like the face of women, red in colour like the *vetchi* flower, situated over the left shoulder, facing west; and (5) *sadhyojaatham*, over the nape of the neck, like the face of kings, white in colour, facing north.

D. 2, line 47. When the Paandiyan King tortured and imprisoned Maanikkavaachakar on the foxes turning into horses, Lord Civan came to the rescue of His devotee by causing a flood rise in the perennially dry river *Vaigai*.

D. 2, lines 62-63. On one occasion, in Kailash, Lord Civan was explaining the eight mystic powers to His hand-maidens. When they grew inattentive, He cursed them to turn into stones under a banyan tree in Pattamangai, and delivered them from the curse some-time later and bestowed on them the eight mystical powers. They are the powers of (1) reducing oneself to the size of an atom, (2) growing to the size of the Meru hill, (3) becoming light like a feather, (4) becoming extraordinarily heavy, (5) travelling everywhere at will, (6) attaining every desired pleasure or knowing miraculously everything that happens everywhere, (7) performing the triple acts of creating, sustaining,

and destroying, (8) mesmerising people to do one's will.

D. 2, lines 68-69. 'became a child'—God came in the shape of an old man seeking the hospitality of a housewife in the absence of her cruel husband and parents-in-law. While the women went into the house to fetch the meal, He changed into a handsome young man much to the embarrassment, puzzlement, and terror of the housewife, and later, on the arrival of the husband and others, He turned into a baby fast asleep in a cradle in the house.

D. 2, line 78. It is said that Civan took Uma as an integral part of Himself in Ekambam – Kaancheepuram – only. Uma, in order to expiate some offence, was worshipping Civan in the form of a *lingam* shaped from the sands of the river *Kampaa*, when Civan made a flood rise in the river threatening to sweep away the *lingam*, whereupon Uma enfolded the *lingam* in her arms to save it from the flood. Since then, it is said, Uma became an integral part of Civan in the left half of His body. Thus Civan assumed the form described in verse 18 of decad 10. Also refer to stanza 5 of decad 29.

D. 5, stanza 76 :

(Extract from Chapter 7 on TRUTH in Aldous Huxley's
'Perennial Philosophy'.

"Why dost thou prate of God? Whatever thou sayest of him is untrue." Eckhart.

"In religious literature the word 'truth' is used indiscriminately in at least three distinct and very

different senses. Thus, it is sometimes treated as a synonym for 'fact', as when it is affirmed that God is Truth—meaning that He is the primordial Reality. But this is clearly not the meaning of the word in such a phrase as "worshipping God in spirit and truth". Here, it is obvious, 'truth' signifies direct apprehension of spiritual Fact, as opposed to second-hand knowledge about Reality, formulated in sentences and accepted on authority or because an argument from previously granted postulates was logically convincing. And finally there is the more ordinary meaning of the word, as in such a sentence as, 'This statement is the truth', where we mean to assert that the verbal symbols of which the statement is composed correspond to the facts to which it refers. When Eckhart writes 'whatever thou sayest of God is untrue', he is not affirming that all theological statements are false. In so far as there can be any correspondence between human symbols and divine Fact, some theological statements are as true as it is possible for us to make them. Himself a theologian, Eckhart would certainly have admitted this. But besides being a theologian, Eckhart was a mystic. And being a mystic, he understood very vividly what the modern semanticist is so busily (and, also, so unsuccessfully) trying to drum into contemporary minds—namely, that words are not the same as things and that a knowledge of words about facts is in no sense equivalent to a direct and immediate apprehension of the facts themselves. What Eckhart actually asserts is this: whatever one may say about God can never in any circumstances be the 'truth' in the first

two meanings of that much abused and ambiguous word."

10-4. "love equalling Kannappan's"—Kaalaththi is a small town in Andhra Pradesh. In the past, it was a wild forest covered territory. There is a hill nearby. On the top of it is a shrine to Civan. Kannappan—literally, he who transplanted his eye—was a Chieftain of a tribe of hunters in that area. He used to go up the hill to worship Civan in the shrine thereon. As a hunter, one of his hands was burdened with his bow. In the free hand, he carried a piece of baked flesh as an offering. So he used his mouth to hold water for washing the idol of Civan. He stuck some flowers in his hair. He used to walk right into the *sanctum sanctorum* with his sandalled feet, and, since both hands were engaged, he would brush off with his sandalled foot any flowers already placed on the top of the idol by the regular priest, wash the idol with the water stored in his mouth, and shake down from his hair the flowers stuck therein on to the top of the idol. Later he would offer the baked meat to God and go back quite happy. The regular priest, who was enraged by this desecration, one day hid himself behind the idol to catch the culprit. God wished to reveal to the priest the unparalleled love of Kannappan. So, when Kannappan came for his usual ritual, he found one of the eyes of the idol streaming with blood. He brought some herbs known to him as a cure for haemorrhage and applied them to the bleeding eye. But they failed to arrest the flow of blood. Immediately he gouged out one of his eyes with the tip of an arrow and planted it on the damaged eye. It got

cured, but the other eye began to bleed. Kannappan, already blind of one eye, put his sandalled foot as a marker on the newly bleeding eye and was about to gouge his remaining eye when the Lord appeared out of the idol and bestowed grace on him. Our mystic refers to this unparalleled love of Kannappan in greater detail in stanza 3 of decad 15.

15-7. 'sinless celebrate'—Vicharasarma, a boy of perhaps seven years, son of Echchadhaththan, a brahmin of Thiruchcheyngaloor used to take out his father's cows to pasture. He was a very highly evolved soul in a little body. He was a god-intoxicated devotee of Civan. He used to fashion a *lingam*, an amorphous image of Civan, out of the mud in the pasture and, bringing the cows, which he was tending, one by one to stand over the *lingam*, he used to milk them so that the milk spurted over the image. Thus he bathed Civan with cow's milk. His father, who was puzzled by the decrease in the yield of his cows, came one day to the pasture ground and caught his son in the act of bathing the *lingam* with the milk of his cows. Enraged, he aimed a kick at the *lingam* and shattered the mud image. His son, without a second thought, took the bill-hook lying by his side and cut off the feet of his father in one swing. This normally heinous act became an act of snow-white purity in view of the love of God which motivated it. It is interesting to note the Tamil word used in the poem for purity. It is *sorru*, the Tamil term for cooked rice. This word has also a connotation of 'pure white' (*poonjunnam*) implying purity.

23-5. (a) *Aattuththevar* : This is a composite word made up of *aattu* and *thevar*. *Aattu* will expand into *attuvikkum* i.e., those who make us dance to their tunes. *Thevar* means *devaas*. I have, therefore translated this phrase as 'The devaas (of the five senses) who sway a person'. In doing so, I have been guided not only by the numerous complaints by Maanikka-vaachakar about the sway which the five senses have over him, but also by the story of the rivalry between the five functions performed by the five sense-organs related in the 1st *Khaandaa* of the 5th *propaathikaa* of the *Chaandogya Upanishad*.

(b) *naattuththevar* : I was about to adopt the interpretation given by Arunai Vadivelu Mudhaliyaar who, linking this phrase with stanza 4 of decad 5 which speaks of certain *devaas* haughtily strutting about on earth claiming to be as good as Civan Himself, thought that this phrase referred to the same haughty *devaas*. But, luckily, I found that St. Sundarar uses a similar term (*naattahaththevar*) and that the same Arunai Vadivelu Mudhaliyaar gives the meaning as *anthanar*, which is also the meaning of the word *boosurar-devaas* on earth. Therefore, on second thoughts, it seemed correct to translate the phrase as 'gods on earth—the ascetics'. For the word *anthanar* should be taken in the sense in which it is used in the 30th verse of *The Thirukkural*. Such an interpretation will be supported by the numerous passages in which Maanikkavaachakar says again and again that even ascetics were not able to apprehend Civan. In the words of the common man,

an ascetic is called *nadamaadum theivam* – God who walks about on earth.

(c) *Settaiththevar*: I have translated this phrase as ‘Lord of the lords of the actuating devaas.’ Sri K. Subramaniya Pillai takes this phrase to refer to *Kaaraneswarars*, i. e. causal or actuating Eeswaraas. They are Sadaacivam, Maheswarar, Ruddhrar, Vishnu and Brahmaa. Maheswarar is lord of the last three, over Maheswarar is Sadaacivam and over all Civan the Godhead. As a matter of fact, we need not take great pains over the interpretation of these phrases except in so far as they contribute to the realisation of the sovereignty and suzerainty of Civan – the Godhead.

43–2. My cousin Sri. T. G. Panchaapakesan, a scholar of no mean merit in Tamil devotional literature, who is a resident of Thiruvidadaimaruthoor, has researched into the reference to Idaivai in this stanza, and has sent me a very learned note. He says that the *Maruthavana-p-puraanam* by Kottaiyoor Sri. Civaṅkolundhu in its *Thava-nilai-ch-charukkam* has four stanzas (verses 35 to 38) on this subject from which it is clear that Idaivai can only be Thiruvidadaimaruthoor. He adds, moreover, that the reference in the stanza to the bestowal of mercy ‘on the artless good damsel in prosperous and long established Idaivai’ refers, according to the authority which he has quoted, only to Lord Civan bestowing mercy on Uma Who was performing *thavam* for a vision of Lord Civan. Lord Civan not only graciously appeared to Her as a Pillar of Fire, but also, in deference to Her desire, assumed the form of a *lingam*—an amorphous symbol in stone for Civan—

which is the object of worship right to this day in the *sanctum sanctorum* of the temple in Thiruvidadaimaruthoor. It goes by the name of Mahaalingam—the Great Lingam.

APPENDIX IV.

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APPENDIX V

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